



CALVARY MURRIETA WOMEN'S MINISTRY

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

R&R BIBLE STUDY 2017-2018



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

Wonderful Widows of Faith: Lesson 7

On our journey to learn from women who loved and served God, we have the privilege of studying a few widows who showed a great amount of faith. These women would never have chosen their circumstance, but made the decision to focus on the Lord and continue to follow Him, rather than allow their sorrow to ruin their lives. It would have been easy and natural for them to get stuck in self-pity and allow those feelings to dictate their future actions, but they didn't. They chose God and placed their trust in Him. They are examples of women of faith, faithfulness, and perseverance. May you be blessed this week as we walk with them, and may their names and lives be honored as they have blazed a path of faithfulness for many to follow!

Before we begin, we need to take a look at how God views widows. They have a special place in His heart, then and now. Widows, along with orphans and foreigners, are subject to God's special care (Psalm 68:5, 146:9, Proverbs 15:25). "Childless widows usually returned to the parental home (Genesis 38:11; Leviticus 22:13). Deprived of husband and protector, a widow was exposed to all sorts of mean actions and extortions, hence laws to protect her and to uphold her cause. Those who ill-treated her were punished (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 14:29; 2 Samuel 14:4-5; 2 Kings 4:1; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 7:6). The early church cared for its poor widows, especially if they had been notable for good works (Acts 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 9, 10, 16; James 1:27)." (1988 Zondervan)

Many widows in Scripture were recipients of miracles. Following the death of a husband, a widow's best hope for security would be her son's ability to provide for her. The loss of a son was even a greater tragedy for a widow. Three miracles happened for women in the Bible to prevent or restore the loss of a widow's son so the family could survive (1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:1-7, and Luke 7:11-17).

This week we will begin with a wonderful woman named Anna. We read her story in Luke 2:36-38. Anna was unlike many women of her time. She seemed to know, understand, and embrace her purpose, and was faithful in that calling. Rather than becoming bitter because of her loss, Anna, which means "favor" or "grace," remained true to her God.

First Day

1. Read Anna's story in Luke 2:21-38. First, describe the context in which Anna's story is told. Why were Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the temple, etc.? List all the facts you find about the "situation." (We will discuss Anna specifically in the next question.)

Mary and Joseph had come to the Temple for the purification rites described in Leviticus 12. Warren Wiersbe writes, "They also had to redeem the boy since he was Mary's firstborn (Exodus 13:1-12). They had to pay five shekels to redeem the Redeemer who would one day redeem us with His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). Their humble sacrifice would suggest that they were too poor to bring a lamb (2 Cor. 8:9). But He WAS the Lamb!"

When we studied Mary of Nazareth, we talked about their act of bringing Jesus to the Temple to dedicate Him, as was the custom. We met a man named Simeon, who prophesied about Jesus, and then told Mary that it would be like a sword piercing her heart (vs 35). And after she receives that news that must have brought her deep sorrow and put a dark cloud over their joy, this woman named Anna "happens" to enter the scene, just as Simon was talking (vs 38).

2. Read Luke 2:36-38. What do we learn about Anna?
3. After hearing Simeon's disturbing news, what effect do you think Anna's comments and reaction had on Mary's heart?

The way Anna's age is described is a bit ambiguous. Some scholars think she is 84, while others believe she lived 84 years "as" a widow, making her about 105. Either way, being married only seven years and then living that long as a widow would be difficult. She is called a "prophetess" which means she "proclaimed divine messages" to the people. It doesn't give us any other examples of that, or much else about her history. It's obvious she knew her God through the Scriptures, she was a devout worshipper, she trusted God to feed her and take care of her, and she prayed without ceasing. I wonder if every time a young couple came in to dedicate their son, she thought to herself, "Is this Him? Lord, is this the One?" I wonder if God had told her she would meet Him? I kind of think He did. She seemed to know that she would have the honor of meeting the One who would bring salvation to all the earth. And then as Simeon prophesied that Jesus would be a Light to reveal God to the nations, Anna could tell that the Light of the world had entered the Temple that day!

4. Let's talk about Anna's choices. What do they tell us about her faith?

5. How did Anna allow her suffering to strengthen her faith?

One of the things I love most about Anna was how faithful she was. Faithfulness means to make faith a living reality in your life, and she certainly did! She stayed the course and didn't waver in her faith, living it out to the end. What a woman! Sometimes persevering is difficult, especially when times get tough. At this exact moment, the World Track and Field Championships in London are on TV in my living room. They are highlighting the American and the Jamaican women's relay teams because they are AMAZING. But they are playing songs about women, and strength, and the girls "getting it done"! (Oh, America won, by the way! Woop Woop!) I couldn't help but think of Anna as one of those strong women who chose the difficult path of trusting God for all things in her life. Her whole world was rocked when she lost her husband, but although her situation changed, she knew her God hadn't. She believed, loved, and trusted her God. I love a quote from Herbert Lockyer. He wrote, "When as a young, motherless wife, God withdrew from her the earthly love she rejoiced in, she did not **bury her hope in a grave**. In the place of what God took, He gave her more of Himself, and she became devoted to Him who had promised to be as a Husband to the widow, and through her long widowhood did not waver in devotion to Him."

6. What are some lessons that you personally have learned from Anna's life?

We will look at a few more things about Anna tomorrow. I pray that the Holy Spirit shines His light on those areas of your heart where you can learn and grow from the example of her surrendered life.

Memory Verse of the Week: "For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name." Psalm 33:21

Second Day

What's your memory verse? Is your heart rejoicing? Do you trust Him?

1. Read Anna's story again in Luke 2:36-38. Answer the following questions:
 - A. Anna didn't give up. Are you facing a difficult situation? Have you given up? How does this minister to you?

- B. Anna did what God called her to do. Read 1 Peter 4:10-11. Are you using the gifts God has given you? Are you being faithful?

 - C. Anna showed a lot of strength as she trusted in God. **God is stronger than** Fill in the blank with your "situation."

 - D. God took care and provided for Anna. How does that encourage you?

 - E. Anna's prayers were accompanied by fasting. Fasting can also be accompanied by confession (Nehemiah 9:1-2), mourning (Joel 2:12), and humility (Nehemiah 9:1). Through fasting, the Lord can give us guidance, victory over temptation, and reveal Himself to us. Do you ever fast? Are you willing to fast in obedience to Him?

 - F. Verse 38 says that Anna spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption. She became the first female to herald the Incarnation, being one of the first missionaries! How does this challenge you? Do you "herald" the Good News of the Gospel to all those in your corner of the world?

 - G. How was Anna's life an example of patience? Are you patient when God has you "waiting" for something?
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- 2. What are some challenges that widows can face?

 - 3. Are there any widows in your life? How can you come alongside and encourage them or help them, if they need it?

Anna "prayed without ceasing" like Paul exhorts us to do in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Timothy Keller writes, "Prayer brings us from duty to delight. Prayer is both conversation and encounter

with God. These two concepts give us a definition of prayer and a set of tools for our prayer lives. The traditional forms of prayer -- adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication-- are concrete practices as well as profound experiences. We must know the awe of praising His glory, the intimacy of finding His grace, and the struggle of asking for His help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of His presence. Prayer, then, is both awe and intimacy, struggle and reality. These will not happen every time we pray, but each should be a major component of our prayer over the course of our lives.”

4. How do we practically pray without ceasing? How would you describe your prayer life?

5. How can prayer be a struggle?

I hope the example of Anna’s life spoke to your heart. Whatever struggle you’re in, whatever rough time you’re facing, or whatever crisis you are experiencing, remember, although our circumstances change, God never does. Trust Him, believe He’s there, and remain faithful to your calling! He’s our **“Reason to Rejoice”!**

Third Day

What’s your memory verse?

Today we’ll look at another widow who is perhaps one of my favorite women in Scripture. She has no name, nor do we know anything about her history. But her one act of faith pretty much sums up her life.

1. Read Mark 12:38-44 and Luke 21:1-4. List the facts you find. Where is this taking place? What does the text say about our widow?

2. Was the widow looking for glory, or to be noticed? Do you think she knew Jesus was going to use her as an object lesson?

3. How was Jesus using her as a contrast to the people mentioned in Mark 12: 38-40? What was He trying to teach them?

A mite is a term to describe a very small amount of money. The widow gave two small copper coins. Each coin was the smallest bronze coin in circulation in Palestine at that time and was called a “lepton,” or “the thin ones.” Two of these coins were probably worth less than one sixty-fourth of a Roman denarius. The story of this woman is often called the widow’s mite.

4. What does this story teach us about giving? About faithfulness? About stewardship?

5. What does it mean to “give out of our lack”, or our poverty?

6. What does this practically mean? How can you and I give out of our lack?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, Luke 6:38, and Matthew 6:1-4. What else do these verses teach us about giving?

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “When it comes to our giving, God sees more than the portion; He also sees the proportion. Men see what is given, but God sees what is left, and by that He measures the gift and the condition of our hearts. More than one wise person has observed, ‘We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.’ “

8. How would God see your giving? Are you a cheerful giver? Do you wait to see what’s left before you give? Are you systematic in your giving? Would you say you are a generous person?

9. How is this story even more significant because the woman is a widow? What does this story reveal about her trust in God? Her love for Him?

10. What does your pattern of giving reveal about your own trust in God?

The word that comes to my mind when I think about our dear friend is “surrender.” She truly surrendered all, trusting that her God would provide for all her needs. **ALL** her needs. **ALL** her needs. She’s known as the woman who gave her all. She gave with cheerful abandon, and Jesus honored that, even giving her an exalted place in His Word. Wow. I’m so happy that the Holy Spirit chose to put her story in Scripture so we can read about her sacrificial life.

11. It’s so cool that our Omniscient Lord who knows all, saw her. He sees her heart, her secrets, and her self-denial, and He knows it’s all because of her love for Him. Then He places her story for safe keeping in His Word, forever. (Proverbs 15:3) How does this encourage you, knowing that God sees and knows all things? What you do in secret will never be forgotten. Does that bless you or scare you?

12. Write the one thing that spoke to your heart the most from this widow’s story, or one thing that the Lord revealed to you about your own.

Fourth Day

Work on memorizing your verse. Will you trust Him today?

As I mentioned before, the Lord performed miracles for some widows to either heal or restore their sons. For our last two days, we will take a look at those three women.

1. Read 1 Kings 17:1-16. Summarize the story and list the facts. Who are the main characters? Who commanded Elijah to do what he did? Why?

2. Explain the role of the widow in this story. How do you think God used her as an encouragement to Elijah? How did God use Elijah to encourage the widow?

3. What was the widow preparing to do when Elijah came upon her? How do you think she must have been feeling at that point? Remember that God had specifically told Elijah to go there, but He hadn't forewarned the widow.

Because Israel was unsafe and Queen Jezebel had put a price on his head, Elijah was on the run. He found refuge in a Gentile, heathen land called Zarephath, in Sidon. Although a Gentile, she seemed to be at least familiar with Elijah's God. The drought had most likely taken its toll on her property and she was at the end of her means. Life was tough. The poor woman seemed to resign herself to the fact that she and her son were about to die. She had no idea that deliverance was right around the corner! Jezebel would never think to look for Elijah in a poor widow's home, and the Lord used this widow to sustain Elijah for two years, and visa versa. Her faith in Elijah's God sustained her. What a difference Elijah must have made in this Gentile home.

4. If you were preparing your last meal, would you give some of it up for a stranger? What does this say about her?
5. The story continues in verses 17-24. Briefly summarize the story.
6. The widow asks Elijah a question in verse 18. How does he reply?

Elijah pleads with the Lord to bring the boy back to life. He pleads earnestly for God to answer his prayer. The widow must have been agonizing downstairs as she was waiting. Minutes must have felt like hours. The Lord heard their prayers, and he was brought back to life! Another miracle!

7. What declaration does the widow make in verse 24?

In verse 12, the widow refers to God as "your" God and now, in verse 24, she believes that Elijah, God's servant, is indeed a man of God and appears to declare her faith in the God of Israel. While on earth, Jesus used the example of the widow of Zarephath to show how gracious

God is to both the Jews and the Gentiles (Luke 4:25-26), showing no prejudice toward certain groups of people. He wants us all to know His great love for us.

This lady had a difficult choice to make. Would she risk having nothing for her last meal or trust that that Elijah's God would provide for her and her son? We all are faced with making similar choices: will we trust God when we are most needy?

8. Are you struggling to trust God in a situation? Are you willing, like this widow, to trust Him, even when it makes no sense?

9. Let's read about our next widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7. Meet the widow with a pot of oil! Observe and list the facts in our story. Who are the main characters?

This lady was a widow of one of Elisha's students, and she reminded Elisha of how much her husband feared the Lord. To lose your husband was bad enough, but then the fear of losing your sons to pay off your debt would be unbearable. God, being the defender of widows, sends Elisha to her rescue. What a scary thing this woman faced; I can't even imagine. And now her faith would most certainly be tested.

10. How does she respond when Elisha asks her what she has in the house?

At first, the widow's eyes are blinded to any possibilities. I have nothing, she says, except oil. But God is able to multiply what we are willing to surrender. He takes what meager thing we have and uses it for His glory. With Moses, God uses his rod to accomplish great things (Exodus 4:2). Peter and the boys had fishing nets (Luke 5:4-7), and the little lad had 5 loaves and two fish (John 6:9). If we surrender it all to Him, He can make a little go a long way!

11. What small "thing" do you have that God wants to use? Have you been holding it back, thinking it too small or too insignificant for God to use?

12. Why do you think she was instructed to "close the door"?

Imagine how she felt as she poured, and poured, and poured. Her faith must have soared as she watched this miracle take place, right before her eyes! Her hope was renewed, being reminded that His mercies are new every morning. Truly, great is His faithfulness.

13. How did she get out of debt?

14. In verse 7, we see that she is supposed to live on “what’s left over.” When Jesus fed the 5,000, there were 12 baskets left over. Why is this significant?

This story reminds us that God is the solution to every problem and the provision for every need. I love what the Psalmist says in Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

15. Are you facing a problem with no apparent solution? Have you turned to the Lord? Surrender all you have to Him, ask Him to pour His wisdom into your heart, and trust Him for the solution.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory. Have you noticed how each widow had to trust in our God?

1. Today let’s read about one more widow in Luke 7:11-17. Observe and list the facts.

Nain was about 25 miles from Capernaum. It was approached by a steep ascent, with burial caves on each side of the road. The widow of Nain is another example of a woman in agony. The plight of this widow was not promising. First, she lost her husband, then her only son. What hope would she have of even surviving? Her future was bleak. And as Jesus is traveling, He comes upon this funeral procession. (Not by accident, of course.) And when He sees her grieving, He is moved with compassion. (Some believe His mom may have also been a widow by this time so perhaps His heart was even softer.) Again, we see His tender heart to those who are hurting and vulnerable. This is also the first person He raised from the dead.

2. Did the woman ask Jesus for His help? What truth does that show us?

Herbert Lockyer wrote, "This miracle was not only an unmistakable credential of His deity and mission, but also the spontaneous outflow of His infinite sympathy with human suffering." Jesus came to her, not because she was seeking Him, but He saw her great need.

3. How does that comfort your own heart? Has God ever met a need you had before you had even asked?

With tender care, He presented the son to his mother. For some reason, it reminded me of when Jesus gave the care of His mother over to His beloved friend John before He died. I think Jesus loves moms, don't you?

The woman felt hopeless and God stepped in. Have you ever felt that your future was bleak and there was nothing to live for? God has a plan for your life and for your future. Even if you're in distress, God sees your pain, and He cries with you. He is our High Priest who sympathizes with our pain and our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15), making continual intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Let's look at some general lessons from the widows we read about this week.

4. The widow from Zarephath showed great hospitality to the prophet Elijah. In the New Testament, we see the widows in the early church also offered the ministry of hospitality by feeding and lodging those in need (1 Timothy 5:10). Whether you are a widow or not, are you given to the ministry of hospitality? (1 Peter 4:9) How can you better open your hands and heart and love people?

5. What are some creative ways to show hospitality to a hurting world?

These women walked by faith. Their pasts were painful, their futures were bleak. Yet they all chose to trust God, hold on to His promises, and trust His character. Trust is a common thread that runs through each of their stories.

6. What emphasis does "trust" have in your life? Do you trust the Lord, do you trust in people, do you trust in your qualifications or your credentials, or even in your own wisdom? Spend some time reflecting on this question ...

If you're in pain, distress, or suffering in some way, take heart. Joshua 1:9 tells us to "Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee." Elisabeth George in her book, Women Who Love God, wrote four steps that we can choose. She writes ...

1. Stop!

Stop fretting and start putting your faith to work! Be anxious for nothing and instead let your requests be made known to God. Then you will experience the peace of God (Philippians 4:6-7).

2. Look!

Look to the Lord in faith. Call upon the Lord and He will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know (Jeremiah 33:3).

3. Listen!

Listen to the promises of the Lord. He promises to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

4. Go!

Go on being a generous, giving woman of faith. Give ... and it shall be given unto you (Luke 6:38).

See you next week ladies!

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."

Psalm 32:10

