

CLOUD STUDY GUIDE

A COMPANION GUIDE TO A
CLOUD OF WOMEN: THE
POWERFUL CONNECTION
BETWEEN BLACK WOMEN
AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

Diane Proctor Reeder & Rev. Dr. Georgia A. Hill

CLOUD STUDY GUIDE

A companion Guide to A Cloud of Women: The Powerful Connection between Black Women and Women of the Bible

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1/4 What is it Really Like to be the First?

EVE / US

GENESIS CHS. 2-4

Eve: First woman. First wife. First mother. Every other woman followed the prototype Eve. Eve knew the joy of birthing a child and the pain of losing a child. She knew both cooperation and conflict with Adam, the first husband. Her images in art depict her as beautiful, but her reputation is anything but.

Let's examine her life from the few Bible verses we have about this enigmatic woman. Let's reimagine Eve and free her (and maybe ourselves) from her one-dimensional image and reputation. Let's delve deeply into Eve and her African American counterparts, and see if we can pull out the life lessons they teach us still today.

Questions

1. Are you the first in anything? College? Something on your job? First to accomplish something else? Dig deep. How was that experience for you? What did you find joyful about that experience? What did you find challenging? Can you reimagine Eve, given your experience?
2. Does Eve deserve her reputation as the one who "ruined it for us all?" Read the biblical account. Is there anything you admire about Eve?
3. Get into Eve's head. Have you ever traveled into something unknown, either spiritually or geographically or emotionally? What were the dynamics of that? How do you think Eve felt going into the ultimate unknown of life on earth?
4. We don't know whether/how Eve might have been scrutinized once the world became more populated. Given human nature, it is possible that Eve's children shared her story with succeeding generations. Have you ever had a group talk about, even "gossip," about you? Did you defend yourself? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever been burdened with a 'bad' reputation? Please share your experience if you are so inclined. Did you defend yourself? How? What do you think Eve could have said to defend herself?
6. Agree to research one of the women mentioned in this chapter who is compared to Eve: Bessie Coleman in her position as pilot. The Hon. Ketanji Brown Jackson as Supreme Court Justice. Vice President Kamala Harris first Black woman nominee of a major political party in the U.S. Mary Jane Patterson. Shirley Chisholm, first Black woman to run for President of the United States. Find out more about their personal stories. In what other ways might their experiences be similar to Eve?
7. Genesis 4:25 tells us that after Eve had Seth, people began "calling on the name of the Lord." Do you think Eve had anything to do with that? Consider the meaning of Seth's name in your answer: the name comes from the Hebrew word "Sheyt" which can mean "appointed," "placed," or "compensation." Also consider at what point Seth was born: after Adam and Eve were banished from their place of paradise, the Garden of Eden.

Eve Questions, cont.

8. List every quote attributed to Eve in the Genesis account:

- Gen. 3:2-3
- Gen. 4:1
- Gen. 4:13
- Gen. 4:25

Based on these quotes, what do you think Eve would say to your group?

9. How does the story of Eve make you think about the experiences of your own mother or the first women in your family or community?
10. What are some ways in which women today still face the challenges of being the first in certain fields or roles?
11. How can we support and uplift the "firsts" among us, whether they are women, people of color, or others who are breaking new ground?
12. What is one way you can be a "first" or a pioneer in your own life, even if it's just in a small way? What step can you take today to start down that path?
13. What path can you blaze for someone else? What can you tell the next woman? What would you tell the women in this room?
14. Do you see Eve differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
15. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Eve—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
16. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like Eve. Do the same with her African American spiritual successors named in this chapter. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
17. Is there something that you did first? Write out a blessing for yourself based on your own pioneering spirit.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



2/4 Women's Voices Rising

DEBORAH / FANNIE LOU HAMER, BLACK FEMALE JUDGES

JUDGES CHS. 4-5

The women in this chapter--Deborah, the only example of a woman judge in the nation of Israel, along with nearly all of the incredible African American women judges cited--had something in common: they were only one or two generations removed from slavery. Oh, and another thing: because of the conditions they faced, they found themselves playing two roles: Judge, and then:

Warrior.

That's because they all had a fierce love for their people, and a fierce hate against the oppression their people faced. That love/hate dynamic drove their actions and their decisions.

Into the hovels of the poor,
Into the dark streets where the homeless groan, God speaks:
"I've had enough; I'm on my way
To heal the ache in the heart of the wretched."

-Psalm 12:5 MSG

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil...

-Prov. 8:13 NKJV

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

-John 13:1 NIV

Deborah is NOT an anomaly. She was strategically chosen by God because He wanted her to fulfill this mission, not because no man was available. The Black women judges in this chapter, many of whom are alive today, felt chosen as well. Think about the parallels as you answer these questions:

Questions

1. What are the key similarities and differences between the leadership styles of Deborah and Fannie Lou Hamer?
2. How did faith and biblical teachings serve as a source of strength and motivation for Deborah, Fannie Lou Hamer and the Black women judges noted in this chapter?
3. The chapter describes Deborah as a "mother in Israel." How does this concept of "mothering" extend to the work of Fannie Lou Hamer and the modern female judges mentioned?
4. What is the significance of the quote "faith without works is dead" in the context of this chapter? How did each of the women mentioned put their faith into action?
5. How does the chapter use the stories of these women to redefine the term "warrior"?
6. The chapter emphasizes the importance of storytelling and passing down history through generations. How did this tradition empower Fannie Lou Hamer, and how might it be important today?
7. Do you see Deborah differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
8. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Deborah—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
9. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like Deborah. Select one of her African American spiritual successors named in this chapter and write out a prayer specific to her. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
10. Imagine that you are a warrior. What are you warring against? Write out a blessing for yourself.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



3/A Mother's Love

MARY MOTHER OF JESUS / MOTHERS OF MARTIN,
MALCOLM & JAMES
LUKE 1:26-56

Mary, Mother of Jesus and the mothers of three 20th-century Black leaders--Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and James Baldwin--all navigated state-sanctioned terror, collective trauma, and revolutionary hope for their people.

They are not the only ones. We as African Americans have been mistreated, brutalized and stripped of our culture and history, victims of stunning brutality and corrupt law enforcement. We have endured and triumphed, and we will continue, with God's help.

But these mothers! All committed to educating and lifting up their brilliant sons. All emphasized learning despite the circumstances of their birth, and the birth of their children. Tragically, all four of them outlived their sons, who died in a system that rejected their right to thrive, their right to speak, their right to make an impact.

Nothing like A Mother's Love.

Questions

1. Are you a mother of a son, or sons? Or a grandmother, or "auntie/play auntie"? If so, do you see yourself in the descriptions of Mary and her three modern-day counterparts?
2. Read the entire Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) aloud, taking turns. How do you view Mary's attitude in this speech of sorts? What do her words say about who she is?
3. How did you view Mary before you read this chapter? Is there a difference in how you see her now?
4. Do you believe it is as hard to raise boys now as it was during Mary's time? What about during the time of the women described who raised boys in the 20th century?
5. How does the author link the Jewish "resistors" (like Mattathias) to African American figures like Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey?
6. Why does the author suggest that Alberta, Berdis, and Louise were all passionate about different forms of art? Do you think that common thread had anything to do with their sons' respective lives, which were so oriented toward purpose and impact? Do you see art as an important aspect of the Christian walk? If so, why?
7. In the poem "Echoes of Mother Mary," what does Mary say about the "hungry" and the "rich"? Do you believe that verse (Luke 1:53) still holds true today?
8. According to James Baldwin (inspired by Mother Berdis), why is the "inability to love" considered the central problem of humanity? Do you see that as a biblical truth?
9. Do you see Mary differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?

Mary Questions, cont.

10. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Mary—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
11. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like Mary. Select one of her African American spiritual successors named in this chapter and write out a prayer specific to her. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
12. Did you pour into your sons? Your daughters? OPC (Other People's Children)? Write out a blessing for yourself based on what you've done, or are trying to do, for them.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



4/ A Tale of Two Tamars

TAMAR, TAMAR / REV. DR. RENITA WEEMS,

BETTY JEAN OWENS

GENESIS 38, 2 SAMUEL 13

This chapter highlights how two women with the same name faced male dominance in vastly different ways.

	Tamar (Genesis 38)	Tamar (2 Samuel 13)
Identity	Daughter-in-law to Judah.	Princess; Daughter of King David.
Conflict	Denied her right to an heir by her father-in-law.	Obsessively stalked and raped by her half-brother, Amnon.
Action Taken	Used a disguise and Judah's own hypocrisy to secure her future.	Assertively said "No" and pleaded for her dignity.
Outcome	Recognized as "more righteous" than Judah; continued the lineage.	Became a "desolate woman," silenced and shamed.
Archetype	The Actor: Exercised agency to challenge authority.	The Acted Upon: Victim of brute force and systemic silence.

Sexual violence has for centuries been used to solidify power: Amnon used his physical strength to consume and control Tamar, while his father David sat quietly by. In the American South, rape was used as a "weapon of terror" during Reconstruction to intimidate into submission Black bodies and minds so they could continue to be used and controlled. Similarly and tragically, the fathers, husbands and brothers of these women too often sat quietly by--afraid to speak up, like David, but for very different reasons.

Questions

1. Contrast how the two Tamars used their voices. Why was the second Tamar's quick-witted defense (offering to marry Amnon) unsuccessful?
2. Do you admire the first Tamar (Judah's daughter-in-law) for what she did? Why or why not?
3. Judah declared the first Tamar "more righteous" than himself. Do you think God agreed?
4. In the context of Hebrew law, why was Judah's failure to give Tamar his son Shelah considered a sin? Do you think it is possible to sin for a "righteous" reason? Why or why not?
5. What do you think of Renita Weems's theory on how prophetic language in the Bible (using images of wayward wives) has been "misapplied" by men? Having read this chapter, do you feel differently about those verses now?
6. As you think about how society was structured in the nation of Israel, how do you think a #MeToo-type movement might have been launched? How might that have played out?
7. Examine Amnon's feelings toward Tamar after his assault. Why do you think his attitude turned so abruptly?
8. Do you think the world "hates" women? If so, where does that animosity come from?

Tamar(s) Questions, cont.

9. Reflect on how Jesus interacted with women in the Gospels. How did he view women versus Judah or Amnon?
10. Do you think the attitudes of Judah and Amnon towards women are typical male attitudes? Is it incumbent on women to change their type of thinking?
11. Do you see these two Tamars differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
12. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Eve—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
13. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like either or both Tamars. Select one of her African American spiritual successors named in this chapter and write out a prayer specific to her. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
14. Do you know something about either of these Tamars? If you can identify, start (if you haven't already) being kind to you. Write a blessing to yourself based on whatever you have been through.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



S/Saving Black Boys

SHIPRAH, PUAH / MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

EXODUS 1

Shout-out to Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, now with the ancestors, who courageously wrote *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* in 1983. He laid out what many of us who are wives or sisters or mothers or even friends of Black men already know: that the conspiracy started at the precise time that Europeans decided to separate persons of African descent into the evil of chattel slavery.

Some of the first women to intervene in such a conspiracy were documented in the Book of Exodus. Shiprah and Puah could not sear their collective consciences, and those of their fellow midwives, by bowing to the wishes of an Egyptian King so threatened by the idea of a “deliverer” that he issued an edict to kill all Hebrew boys as soon as they exited the wombs of their mothers. Their spiritual daughter, Marian Wright Edelman, could not sit by while Black children went hungry and uneducated.

Consider their strategies. Template them for your own purposeful work.

Questions

1. What do the names "Shiphrah" and "Puah" mean in Hebrew? How does the text use these definitions to describe their character?
2. According to the text, why was Pharaoh specifically afraid of the Hebrew male children? What does this say about the nature of power and fear?
3. What specific reason did the midwives give Pharaoh for why they couldn't kill the babies? What does that reveal about how they viewed their fellow women travelers? How can we inhale that lesson when it comes to how we view our fellow women travelers?
4. The Morality of the Lie: The text notes that the midwives "feared God, and they lied." How does the author reconcile this contradiction? Do you agree that deception is justified in the face of "wicked rulers"?
5. "Othering" Today: The author describes how Pharaoh "othered" the Israelites. Can you identify modern examples where a group is "othered" by those in power? What are the consequences?
6. At the end of Exodus 1, we see that Pharaoh "doubled down" on his murderous strategy. Instead of trying to kill newborn boys, he threw up his hands and ordered the killing of Hebrew boys, period. When oppressive, man-made structures respond to your pushback with that level of madness, what can you do?
7. Senator Kennedy was stunned by the poverty in the Delta, saying, "Maybe they just don't know." Do you believe people are unaware of poverty today, or is it a matter of "hard hearts," as the author suggests?

Shiphrah & Puah Questions, cont.

8. Do you see Mary differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
9. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Shiphrah & Puah—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
10. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like Shiphrah and Puah. Do one for Marian Wright Edelman too. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
11. Are you an institution-builder? Have you influenced other women for good work? Write out a blessing for yourself and for the work you do.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



6/Raising the Dead

RIZPAH/SYBRINA FULTON, IDA B. WELLS BARNETT

2 SAMUEL 21:1-14

In one of the first “ethnic cleansings” in recorded history, Saul, Israel’s first king, oversaw the killing of a group of non-Jews who lived with the Israelites in the land: the Gibeonites. In so doing, he violated the promise Joshua, Moses’s successor, had made decades before not to kill this group of people.

After Saul’s death and David’s elevation to Israel’s king, there is a famine in the land. David immediately went to the remaining Gibeonites, who would be satisfied with nothing less than an eye for an eye: the killing of seven of Saul’s sons and grandsons.

For Rizpah, Saul’s concubine, she lost not only one son, but two—at the same time. An unthinkable tragedy, a tragedy compounded by King David’s ordering the death of actually seven of the late King Saul’s sons, leaving yet more mothers to grieve.

If you are a mother, what happens when it is your own beloved son? Even worse: when he is caught, through no fault of his own, in the killing jaws of a system that makes no sense? Think of Sybrina Fulton, whose son Trayvon Williams was such a victim. At the same time, remember the journalist Ida B. Wells Barnett, who brought media attention to the unjust killing fields where the strange fruit of lynching stole the lives of so many Black men.

Let’s delve deeply into the lives of these individuals and see if we can find some lessons during a time where it would have been nearly impossible to find some good.

Questions

1. Think about Rizpah's response to the tragedy of her two sons' deaths on the very same day. What might her actions (see 2 Sam. 21:10) say about the healing process?
2. Consider what David did after Rizpah's actions. Do you think he felt guilty about killing the sons of his enemy Saul's concubine? Or did he feel justified?
3. Do you think Rizpah's move to call attention to these seven young men David had killed moved David to collect Saul and his beloved friend Jonathan's bones as well and move them back to Israel where they also could be buried properly?
4. There are times when God is recorded as "calling for" certain killings. Do you think this incident with the children of David's concubines is one of those times? Do you think God ever punishes a subsequent group for the sins of the former group?
4. Do you believe that Rizpah's actions served to "heal the land"? (After all, the famine ended after David allowed for a proper burial for her sons.) Why or why not?
6. The Bible says that David was a man "after God's own heart." What do you think Rizpah might say about that?
7. This chapter gives us many examples of Black women "Rizpahs," historic and contemporary. It says that Sybrina Fulton 'faced her pain and used it as fuel.' What else can we do today to model Rizpah's courageous statement? Is there anything that God might be nudging you to do? If you have yourself endured such a tragedy in your own family or community, how might you and your village 'face your pain and use it as fuel'?

Rizpah Questions, cont.

8. It appears that the simple, compassionate act of burial was all that was needed to heal the land after Saul's brutal act of genocide. The chapter describes this act as a way to close the wound and acknowledge the act. What wound-closing do you need today? What wound-closing does your community, or our world, need today? What are some ways we can close wounds in this way?
9. Do you see Rizpah differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
10. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Rizpah—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
11. You are face-to-face with Rizpah. Whether you have lost children to violence or not, craft something to say to her that you think would contribute towards heart-healing.
12. Select one of Rizpah's African American spiritual successors named in this chapter and write out a prayer specific to her. Explain your rationale for this prayer.
13. What have you lost? God forbid, a child? Write a blessing to yourself. We pray that you will heal well.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



1/ Speaking Truth to Power

ESTHER / SHAYE MOSS & RUBY FREEMAN

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Esther is a story familiar to Christians and Jews alike. Many know the contours of the story, but now we are going to drill down into the particulars: palace intrigue; a woman desperate to hide her identity while her relative challenged her from afar; and let's admit, a harem that this Jewish woman was forced to enter (see Esther 2:8; she was "brought" along with other women to the palace grounds).

Esther is essentially making the best of a bad situation and finds favor with a king who demonstrates the worst aspects of patriarchal and institutional cruelty--banishing one wife who dares to "disobey," running an in-house beauty contest so he can choose a new sexual partner who will be a wife-among-many, and an evil second-in-command who serves as the king's chief influencer, causing him to do something he never intended--destroy an entire people. There is more to Esther than the "romantic" story whose traditional oral highlights mask the ugliness of her reality.

Her spiritual daughters, Shaye Moss & Ruby Freeman, took a similar risk when they agreed to speak truth to power by disputing the Trump narrative of "rigged elections" by describing their own integrity as poll workers in Georgia. Like Esther, their truth-telling meant revealing their true identities, despite the death threats and false accusations, to bring justice to their nation.

In both cases, we see Esther's, and Shaye's, and Ruby's strength and courage. We applaud their ability to navigate the impossible. With God's help, they prevailed.

Questions

1. We acknowledge the evil of Haman, the man so close to the King of Persia who wanted to kill, not only Mordecai who dared not to follow the king's edict to bow, but Mordecai's entire people, Israel. But do we do the same thing? Do we extend our anger at one individual to their entire family, or community, or nationality? Examine yourself and your own heart. What do you find? How can you change?
2. "For such a time as this" is such an iconic phrase. Have you ever felt that you were called to a specific place for a specific purpose? What was that like for you? Was there danger involved? Was courage required? If so, did you summon the courage successfully? How?
3. Esther is the one book in the Bible where the name of God is never mentioned. Do you think that suggests that God was absent? If not, where do you see God's hand and why do you believe He is there?
4. Esther, and Shaye Moss and Ruby Freeman, were compelled by circumstances to hide their true identities. Have you ever felt that you had to hide your true self from others? Why did you feel this way? How did you handle it?
5. Truth-telling is dangerous work. Esther, Shaye and Ruby risked their lives to tell the truth. What have you had to risk to tell the truth? How did your faith help you summon the courage to do so? How can our faith practices prepare us for the truth-telling to come?
6. In addition, like many enslaved African Americans, Esther had to be wise and ingenious in the fight against injustice. She is very circumspect as she goes to the king, and she refuses to show all her cards as she moves through her scheme to expose Haman, the king's chief nobleman. We are living in times that call for creativity, and perhaps even craftiness as we navigate a society that in some respects is barely recognizable. What can we learn from Esther's example?
7. We are living in times that call for wisdom and ingenuity in our fight for justice. What can we learn, and implement, from Esther's example?

Esther Questions, cont.

8. Related question: Esther was something of an "insider" in the kingdom. African Americans have been on the "inside" of institutions corollary to Persia—local, state and national government apparatuses, large corporations and other organizations where we are "the only" or one of few. Can we learn anything from her "inside game?"
9. How alone must Esther have felt, the only Jewish girl in an ungodly kingdom! Her cousin Mordecai, who was her guardian, challenged her to "step up." As a woman, what message might you get to her that would encourage her in her challenging journey?
10. Do you see Esther differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
11. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Esther—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
12. Write a prayer for the women around the world who daily risk their lives for others. Take some time to learn about Christian women who are fighting for justice and who rely on their faith, both quietly and outwardly.
12. Do you feel, somehow, that this is "your time?" Are you positioned somewhere "for such a time as this?" Write a prayer for open eyes and a courageous heart to follow the Lord's leading at this divine time in your life.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



8/We Want Peace!

ABIGAIL / THE PEACE WOMEN OF LIBERIA

1 SAMUEL 25

It is so much easier to offer a critique rather than a solution. It's easier to complain than it is to create. And is it much easier to stand and watch than it is to step in and take action. Abigail and the women of Liberia offer a powerful picture of intercession - intercession as prayer and intercession as literal stepping into the conflict and pushing for peace.

When David threatened a violent attack against Abigail's husband and his workers, Abigail placed herself in humble submission before David in an appeal for peace. The Peace Women of Liberia donned white outfits and prayed and sat and stood and linked arms for months and months in their very public appeal to the government to end the war that was shattering their country. Both Abigail and her modern day Liberian sisters spoke out against present circumstances by speaking toward a brighter future. The words they spoke and the approach they used called these warring men to their better selves. All of these women saw a tomorrow that was brighter than their today...and they said so.

Questions

1. Think about these women: Abigail and the Liberian women, separated by two millennia. What do you take from them? What do you think fueled their courage?
2. Is there anything in your community that you want to stop? Any challenge that appears unsurmountable?
3. In our community, we talk a lot about violence—inflicted by the self, by others closest to us, even by our government. What strategies can we take from Abigail and Liberia?
4. Has God ever given you a dream? Did you act on it? What was the result?
5. Dreams are not just for sleepers. What do you dream about now? How is God leading you to act?
6. The Liberian women were from both the Christian and Muslim faiths. Do you believe that Christians and persons of other faiths can collaborate on issues like this that are common human challenges? Why or why not?
7. Abigail did something that some women say they would never do: she fell at King David's feet. Some would call that groveling. Do you think it is ever appropriate to "grovel?" Does the motive or the circumstance matter?
8. Do you see Abigail differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
9. Abigail and the Peace Women of Liberia spoke to the future of the men of war. Have you ever spoke to a person's future, encouraging them to be their best selves? How does our faith help us to speak to a future we have not yet seen?
10. Sometimes we act alone and at other times collectively, how do we strengthen our faith and our resolve when we step in to oppose violence? How do we keep our faith when — as was the case in Liberia — we don't at first see the change we hope for?

Abigail Questions, cont.

9. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Abigail—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
10. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like Abigail. Now write out a prayer specific to the Peace Women of Liberia. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
11. Do you identify with Abigail? Not that any of you have married the man who killed your husband, of course! But: have you ever been/are you currently married to a man like Nabal? Find a way to bless yourself. What would you say?

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



9/Come Into My House and Stay

LYDIA / BRIDGET "BIDDY" MASON,
LISETTE DENISON FORTH

ACTS 16

There is this stereotyped view of women that our primary job is to extend hospitality by keeping a pretty home and setting a nice table. But hospitality is so much more. Hospitality extends home and heart, a seat, an open door, a bite of food or drink, hope and love. What do you have to share? A lot? A little? Whenever we share, whenever we invite someone in, we are extending hospitality.

When Lydia opened her home to the followers of Jesus she provided food, shelter and a home base from which they could do ministry. Her gesture made it possible for the Jesus movement to rest, refresh and venture out to tell the world about Jesus. Her hospitality fueled a movement. Bridget Biddy Mason and Lisette Denison founded churches which extended the hope and help of Jesus Christ to thousands of weary souls in search of a place to feel welcomed. Through their actions the hospitality of Jesus Christ was extended to others. In so doing, they demonstrated what we all should know: hospitality is not just women's work.

Questions

1. What do you have that you can offer to build God's Kingdom? A place where a few people can gather to worship as well as plan and strategize?
2. What do you have that you can invest? How can you invest in yourself, the way Lydia and Bridget and Lisette did?
3. Is there a business idea bubbling up in your spirit? What do you need to bring it to fruition?
4. Describe in your own words the courage of these three women. What did they risk by doing what they did?
5. Does your area have a body of water? Consider going there one day with a group of sister-friends to pray and worship, remembering the example of Lydia (Acts 16:13). If you do, what effect can you say the water had on your worship experience?
6. How do the stories of Lydia, Biddy and Lisette challenge your personal faith about women's work? How can we shift the traditional narrative of meals at church so that meal service promotes the spread of the Good News of Jesus?
7. Do you see Lydia differently as a result of reading this chapter? If so, in what way(s)?
8. Name some other Black women who come to mind when you think of Lydia—famous or non-famous, women in your community, your family. What makes you associate them with her?
9. Write out a prayer or a blessing specifically tailored for someone like Lydia. Now write out a prayer specific to Bridget and Lisette. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
10. Have you practiced hospitality in your home? Is it something you love to do? Have you opened your home to a friend or a family member who needed shelter? Write out a blessing for yourself as one who has shown hospitality to friends, relatives, church members, or ministers.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



10/Named and Nameless Women Who Loved Jesus

LUKE 8:2; MARK 16:9; JOHN 20:1-18

GENESIS CHS. 2-4

When I (Diane) conducted a Google search to find verses on Mary Magdalene, Luke 7:37 popped up. Only one problem: That's a verse about an unnamed woman whom the gospel writer called a "sinner." And then biblical scholars automatically assumed that "sinner" meant prostitute. Wow.

Mary Magdalene, however, was described as a woman whom Jesus delivered from seven demons. The biblical account does not specify how those demons manifested themselves. Biblical interpreters have long conflated the "sinner" woman with Mary Magdalene, which says more about them than it does about her.

Mary Magdalene was a disciple of Jesus, one who followed and listened to his teachings. She was the first person Jesus appeared to after His resurrection. And it was she who was sent by Jesus to proclaim that Jesus had risen from the dead. She is a significant figure in the scriptures, not a footnote.

There are many women named in the scriptures who followed Jehovah and later, Jesus. There are many unnamed women. But know this: as a woman, God knows you and has called you by name. He has plans and purposes for your life.

As we come to the end of this study, think about the unique ways the women in this book have stepped out in faith. Think about your life and what you believe about God. How will you move forward differently?

Ponder these things in your heart (Luke 2:19).

Questions

1. Have you ever been misunderstood? Has your reputation ever been sullied despite your innocence of anything that the wagging tongues may say? What does that do to your spirit? How did you respond?
2. There are those who say that those whom the Bible describes as having been delivered from demonic possession may have had severe mental illness that was not addressed. Despite that description, Jesus delivered. Are you plagued by any mental "demons"? What are they, and what do you need to do to get free?
3. In this chapter, I (Rev. Georgia) talk about the fact that whenever the word "sinner" is used to describe a woman in the Bible, commentators seem to assume that refers to sexual sin, as if that is the only inference they could possibly make when referring to a female sinner. Look up and list the verses that make mention of the things that God hates (e.g. Prov. 6:16-19). What other behaviors might that word "sinner" refer to? Are you guilty of any of those? Find a trusted confidante with whom you can share your confession who will pray with you. "Confess your faults to one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).
5. As a woman, do you ever feel like more of a sexual object than anything else? How do you identify who you are in other ways?
6. Do you agree with the idea that Mary Magdalene was a disciple, just as the twelve men who are explicitly described as such were? Consider hosting a group viewing of the series *The Chosen* and discuss how the women are depicted there.
7. List the women mentioned in Mark 15:41. Do a study on what women's lives were like in those times, and talk about how these women lived and what their challenges might have been. How are those challenges different from, and how are they similar to, yours?

Mary Magdalene Questions, cont.

8. One common thread runs through all of the women mentioned in Chapters 1–10: Courage. How can you be more courageous, and what can you glean from these women that will inspire you to step out on faith and walk into God's purpose for your life? Does anything scare you about that? Talk about it!
9. Write out a series of prayers and blessings specifically tailored for women like these named and unnamed women of the Bible. Explain your rationale for these prayers.
10. Finally: write a series of prayers and blessings for yourself. Talk about the women you identified with the most in this series of discussions. Share those prayers, and make an agreement to pray for each other based on your collective felt needs, concerns and challenges.
11. Say her name! In the chapel in Israel named after Mary Magdalene the atrium has 8 beautiful stone pillars that are each inscribed with the name of a female follower of Jesus. The eighth pillar however is left blank. The women who visit the chapel are invited to 'write' their name on the blank pillar. Whose name would you add? Make a list of the women of faith who have inspired you. Remember their stories, their sacrifices and the lessons they taught. Think about your own life and your walk with Jesus. Add your name to the list.

What are YOUR Thoughts? What Questions
Would YOU Add?



TO OUR READERS...

We (Diane and Rev. Georgia) fervently pray that our book, *A Cloud of Women*, and this Cloud Study Guide, would move you to think more deeply about your faith, and feed your hunger to grow spiritually. Please do reach out to us, to tell us what you think: on Instagram (@acloudufwomenbook), through our website (www.acloudofwomen.com), or via email (dreeder@writtenimages.co). We're available for speaking engagements, book clubs (happy to attend virtually if you're outside of the State of Michigan), teaching or panel discussions as well. If you love the book, please leave an Amazon review!

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