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*The Women who
Protected Moses and
Saved a Nation*

Bold + Brave

This study belongs to:

Start date:

Women of Welcome

is a community dedicated to diving into the whole of Scripture to understand God's heart for the immigrant and refugee. We believe God calls us to a deep love for the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the forgotten. Together we are on a journey to understand biblical hospitality in an authentic way. Therefore, we seek to learn, engage, and grow to be more like Christ in our welcome toward this vulnerable population of people.

Women of Welcome was founded in 2017 and is a collaborative partnership between World Relief and The National Immigration Forum.

The *Bold & Brave* Bible study was written by Sarah Quezada & Bri Stensrud (copyright 2021).

Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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Study Context

At the beginning of the book of Exodus, Jacob's sons and their families have settled in Egypt, becoming the people of Israel and filling the land. Fast-forward about 400 years and we see what life was like for the Israelites around the time Moses was born. The author of Exodus tells us that the current unnamed pharaoh did not know Joseph and viewed the growing numbers of Israelites as a security threat to his kingdom and power. As a result, he took actions to oppress the Israelites and force them into slavery. However, the more they were oppressed, the more their population grew. This pushed Pharaoh to take more extreme actions and order, first the midwives, and then all his people, to kill every Hebrew boy that was born for fear that they would grow up and form a possible rebellion in the future. This is the setting we find ourselves in when we are introduced to Shiphrah and Puah (the midwives), Jochebed and Miriam (Moses' mother and sister), and Pharaoh's daughter, all of whom play a different but significant role in Moses' story.

Despite the harsh and fearful narrative circulating among the community, all of these women chose to believe something different. At great risk to themselves and their families, they chose to boldly and bravely trust God in the midst of it all. They held onto hope, accompanied those who were suffering, spoke up for vulnerable families, and acted on their compassion. Through these actions they demonstrate what it looks like to fear God above any other ruler or circumstance, a central theme of Exodus.

Today, we find ourselves in a different context, but we still face the challenges of stepping into difficult conversations, of speaking up against injustice and taking action. As you begin this study, start praying about what courageous ventures God might be calling you into.

Speaking up and taking action is not easy; it can bring risk and pain. But as these women will show us in the pages ahead, we're called to fear God above all others. He is the one who will help us and give us the courage we need to do brave things. Let's learn from these women in Exodus as we seek boldness and bravery.

You're invited to host or join a small group study in our Women of Welcome community.

Visit www.WomenofWelcome.com to find ways to connect.

Study Scripture

EXODUS 1:8–2:10 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens.

They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives. And the

people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."



**Week
One**

**Shiphrah
and Puah**

“

**Be of good courage, and let
us be courageous for our
people, and for the cities of
our God, and may the Lord
do what seems good to him.**

2 Samuel 10:12

”

Day 1

An Agonizing Decision

EXODUS 1:15–16 Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you serve as a midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.”

Our study begins with the descendants of Jacob living in the land of Goshen because of God’s provision through Joseph’s relationship with Pharaoh.

“The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and . . . put them in charge of my livestock” (Gen. 47:5–6).

The people of God were flourishing and multiplying throughout the region. Not only were they given some of the best land in the area, they were most likely given the best tools and supplies needed to farm and feed Pharaoh’s livestock. After years of family disputes and famine, the Hebrew people found themselves thriving, living in a place of privilege (Ex. 1:7) among their Egyptian neighbors.

During this time in history (1900–1700 BC), power struggles between competing kingdoms were common, and regional takeovers a legitimate concern. Exodus 1:8–14 says that a new king arose over Egypt, one that did not know Joseph, and therefore began to fear the flourishing of the Hebrew people. Because of his fear, Pharaoh decided to “deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us.”

But as the oppressive burdens increased, so did the blessing of children among Hebrew families. Here enter the midwives.

Biblical commentaries suggest these midwives could have been Hebrew (they had Hebrew names) or Egyptian (as conversations seem to set them apart as superintendents of other Hebrew midwives). Whether they were Hebrew or Egyptian seemed irrelevant to their profession. Shiphrah and Puah were important members of society. Their team of midwives was busy with the multitude of Hebrew births taking place.

Midwives provided emotional, physical, and spiritual support to women who were in their most vulnerable stages of bearing children. They were witness to the miracle of life on a constant basis. Entering the homes of thousands of families, they helped newly born infants catch their first breath. Their presence in these moments most likely created a close bond with women throughout the community.

“Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ‘When you serve as a midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live’” (Ex. 1:15–16).

Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be told by the most powerful leader in the region to betray your profession, your neighbor, another woman, a mother?

You're a trusted friend to thousands of families in your city, and now you're being asked to do the unthinkable. You're asked to betray the very instincts and values ingrained into your being. You're asked to betray humanity. What depth of shock and grief must have pulsed through their veins as they stood before Pharaoh and heard this command.

How could they ever be expected to do such a thing?

I (Bri) imagine these two women leaving Pharaoh's presence, walking down the palace steps, and back into their community. The agony in their hearts must have been unbearable.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever been asked to do something you knew was wrong? Maybe it was a friend asking you to lie or go along with a plan you knew in your gut wasn't honoring your faith or values. What did you do in that situation?

Read Exodus 1:8–13 in your Bible. What was the prime motivation for Pharaoh's actions toward the Hebrews?

Instead of looking for ways to unify people in the region, Pharaoh decided to afflict the Hebrews with “heavy burdens.” Can you think of a time your fear has intentionally (or unintentionally) put heavy burdens on the people around you?

What brave conversations might you need to have in order to relieve a burden and do the right thing by those entrusted to you?

Notes:

[illegible]

Day 2

Facing Fears

EXODUS 1:17–19 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”

The Hebrew word for fear in verse 21 is yare’ which is a term for piety, obedience, the true worship of God. The Hebrew word for God in this verse is Elohim (the living God).

I (Bri) suspect that it wasn’t long before Pharaoh received word that the midwives did not obey his command. Imagine receiving orders to go back to the palace and appear before Pharaoh after you intentionally defied his orders. How frightening!

But was Pharaoh’s anger the only thing to fear? I assume Shiphrah and Puah had a long list of fears, including (but not limited to) how Hebrew families would respond to them killing their children or how their friends in the community would disown them for such a heinous act.

If you were a midwife, intentionally killing babies couldn’t be good for business. How would you continue in your profession after word got out? Not only that, infanticide was a crime in most countries at that time. Pharaoh had asked them to do something he couldn’t do. He wanted Shiphrah and Puah to quietly commit illegal acts of genocide and do so with the utmost loyalty.

The king, in disbelief of their insubordination, called the midwives back into his court, “Why have you let the male children live?” Their reason: “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” Now most commentators suggest it’s possible this statement was partially true. Exodus 1 tells us the Hebrews “increased greatly,” and it’s reasonable to believe there weren’t enough midwives to go around (catching every infant at the moment of birth). But we know from verse 17 that their response to the king wasn’t completely straightforward. Shiphrah and Puah feared God. That was their reason.

Egyptians paid tribute to many gods: gods of wisdom, vengeance, sun, stars, and even fertility. The Hebrews worshiped one God while living among Egyptians who worshiped many gods. But something was obvious throughout the region:

The Hebrews were flourishing. Despite their oppression and ruthless slavery, they were blessed.

The Hebrews' God was different. Their God was present and active in their lives.

Whether these midwives were Egyptians or Hebrews, they feared Elohim (the living God) more than anyone else. Pharaoh had asked the unthinkable, overestimating his power in their hearts. And while they had every reason to fear Pharaoh, their fear of Elohim instilled a boldness that not only saved lives, but an entire nation.

QUESTIONS

As Christian women we're very familiar with Proverbs 31, but today's story has a special connection to verse 30. Take a moment to find this verse in your Bible. Does anyone specific come to mind when you think about this kind of woman?

Shiphrah and Puah feared Elohim, the living God. As we go about our busy lives, it can be difficult to remember that God is alive and active. He is familiar with all our ways. How might these simple truths give us courage to enter into difficult circumstances and conversations with boldness?

Read Hebrew 10:32–39. What do you find most encouraging in these verses?

If in a small group, share a time when you knew God was calling you to be bold. What happened as a result of your courage?

Notes:

[illegible]



Day 3

An Unexpected Blessing

EXODUS 1:20–21 So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

Yesterday we imagined what it might be like to stand before Pharaoh, facing the wrath of an intentionally foiled plan. We knew Shiphrah and Puah feared God, but surely they also feared the king. Were they afraid for their own lives? If Pharaoh could order the killing of innocent children, then imprisoning or beheading two defiant and disloyal women could reasonably be expected.

I (Bri) wonder if upon receiving the summons they cried and prayed throughout the night. Maybe they woke the next morning and said final goodbyes to family and friends before heading back to the palace. They had been bold. They had been brave. They had defied Pharaoh. What was to become of them?

The text doesn't tell us how Pharaoh dealt with Shiphrah and Puah. We only see God's response, that he dealt with them. Isn't that amazing?

Their response to Pharaoh must have been somewhat believable, but Pharaoh became outraged. In verse 22 he escalates the entire situation to the point of madness (we'll get to that tomorrow). But here these women stood and then were dismissed, only to be dealt with by the God they honored.

Shiphrah and Puah were asked to take the lives of children, to destroy families in their community. And yet God's response to their reverence gave them the very thing they had been instructed to take from others. Their fear turned to blessing.

Ladies, do we have this kind of trust in our God?

Do we care enough about the lives around us that we gather every ounce of emotional energy we have to enter into hard spaces?

Do we believe that God can and does bless us for this kind of work?

The truth is, being brave is exhausting.

Choosing to be bold requires risk.

We might not feel as if we have the energy or margin to do brave and bold things, but the people God has placed in our lives, in our families, and in our communities are worth it. They must be. We must choose to find the time. Jeremiah 29:7 says that we must choose their flourishing for the sake of our own. Just like Shiphrah and Puah, we are not responsible for the outcome of our efforts. Time and again, God has shown that he alone can be trusted with this part of the story.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever been asked/told to pick between two impossible choices? What was the scariest or most painful aspect of the situation?

Sometimes our fears overshadow our remembrance of God's faithfulness to us. Can you recall a time when God's provision was clearly evident during a difficult period in your life?

What encouragement do we have from the Scriptures when facing seemingly impossible situations?

What promises can we be assured of from these verses?

Hebrews 13:5
James 1:5
Psalms 46:10
Nahum 1:7
Isaiah 40:31; 43:2

**Take a moment to read and reflect on
Jeremiah 29:7**

Notes:

[illegible]

Day 4

Facing Evil

Exodus 1:22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

If anyone ever thought that choosing to follow God would ensure privilege and blissful prosperity, here’s one of many Bible stories that grounds us from such a lofty idea. It’s true that our obedience to God opens avenues of blessing, but as Christians we are sober-minded about such things. We’ve all followed God into places that haven’t turned out as we expected. We’ve seen godly men and women suffer persecution and death as they ministered in places around the world. And if we look at the lives of Jesus’ disciples, none of them retired into a peaceful old age after spreading the gospel across Asia.

Shiphrah and Puah were blessed for fearing God.

But what happened next no one could have foreseen.

Overcome with fear and anger, Pharaoh commissioned a genocide against the Hebrews, and every citizen was told to play a part in the massacre. Egyptians and Hebrews were living in shared spaces and communities together, and now at any moment someone could take your baby and drown them. Shiphrah and Puah must have been beside themselves with grief. Had they caused this? Should they have done something differently? Why were their lives being blessed and yet their neighbors’ lives subject to such suffering?

I (Bri) wonder how the community reacted. Did they think Pharaoh mad or was there already a growing angst among Egyptians that made this idea acceptable? Pharaoh had done his best to dehumanize the Hebrew people. He had given them heavy burdens, and he had made them “work as slaves and their lives bitter with hard service.” The culture seemed ripe with contempt for those not of Egyptian descent.

Try to imagine the scene. Did neighbors barge into homes and steal children? Did mobs gather to march into the land of Goshen and ransack homes? The anxiety must have been debilitating; the chaos in the streets, unbearable.

Pharaoh's command must have been followed, at least to some extent. Exodus 2 tells us that Jochebed (Moses' mother) hid her baby for three months and then made the painful decision to place him in the Nile.

Sometimes life doesn't present good options, and the people of God are not exempt from these hardships.

QUESTIONS

If you were a Hebrew mother at this time, what might you have done upon hearing this command?

Matthew 5:9 tells us that simply trying to “keep the peace” is not an option. We are called to make peace. How did Shiphrah and Puah create peace in the midst of such evil?

Our faith demands that we choose what is good and right even when things are complicated. What does 2 Timothy 4:5 say about this?

Notes:

[illegible]

Going Deeper

Sometimes the environment we're placed into is no longer safe. Decisions that affect our daily lives and well-being are made above our status, position, or pay grade, and we have to decide how to survive. When ideals are shattered, we're forced to evaluate our priorities. Flourishing usually falls low on the list, and survival becomes paramount. Sometimes God puts us in these environments to do the very thing Shiphrah and Puah did: to stand against injustice and help others. Other times, as we'll read in the weeks to come, we have to prayerfully make a plan.

In our Women of Welcome community, we're often asked why families don't simply stay in their home countries and fight against violence and corruption. The answer is, many do. The vast majority of immigrants want to stay in their home countries. They don't wish to start over in a new place where they don't speak the language and where their very presence will be unwelcomed. But they simply don't have the means to stand up to an entire government and its systemic issues. Migrants leave when they feel as if they have no other choice.

Lorena is a wife and mother of two teenage children. She left Honduras to save the life of her son who was threatened by local gang members. Watch her story in our *Who is Welcome Here* film, episodes 4 & 5 (free on our Women of Welcome YouTube channel. Search YouTube: Women of Welcome- Who is Welcome Here).



Brave Story

A story graciously shared from our Women of Welcome community:

Hannah looks like any other young Southern mom who likes Chick-fil-A sweet tea, shopping at Target, and snuggling up to watch a movie with her family. She is friendly, soft-spoken, and unassuming. But her story of brave faith is testimony to God's great love and mercy through hardship, motherhood, and ministry.

When Hannah was eight, her family moved to the northwest region of Africa out of a desire to show love to Muslim people. Six years later, accused of "christianizing" and sharing the gospel, Hannah's father was killed by al-Qaeda operatives. Her family was devastated. They lost her father, and they lost their home. Out of necessity, she and her family returned to the United States. Unprocessed grief from the trauma of losing her father brought on a very dark time for her in high school, leaving her feeling very far away from the God she had been close to in her childhood. Just after graduating high school, she became a single mother. And with the birth of her child came the longing for

a renewed relationship with God. She prayed for healing, strength, and love for the road ahead.

Her mother eventually married a man whom Hannah describes as mirroring “the fatherly heart of God.” One Sunday her stepfather gave a sermon about God’s heart for immigrants and the challenge to extend love to refugees in the United States. He spoke about the staggering number of globally displaced refugees and how many of those unreached by the gospel in remote locations are now refugees on our doorstep in our own cities. Hannah said, “This gave me a whole new perspective on missions. I began to pray to God about this conviction in my heart. I wanted to be part of it somehow.”

This desire led Hannah to strategically move into an apartment complex primarily made up of Gujarati Indians. Living there was a combination of henna parties, building friendships with neighbors, and what seemed like an endless fight with bedbugs. She was able to share Jesus with some of her neighbors, but the slowness of their response to the gospel discouraged her. She concluded, “Maybe God was using me to begin these relationships and plant seeds so that others would be able to water the seeds and see more growth of faith in this

“Maybe God was using me to begin these relationships and plant seeds so that others would be able to water the seeds and see more growth of faith in this community.”

community.”

During this time, Hannah’s parents opened up their home to a young Muslim woman named Ayan and her little boy. A refugee from Somalia, Ayan had a heartrending story of trauma and abuse. She suffered multiple mental breakdowns as a result of PTSD and previously untreated mental illness. But Hannah and her parents showered love on Ayan and her son and treated them as part of their family. They were able to pray for her, read the Bible to her, and show her God’s love. Over time, Ayan came to know Christ. “She is a testimony of how hard we the church need to love the lost and broken. It requires sacrifice, tears, prayer, and intentionality. It is not easy, but it is so worth it, to see someone come out of darkness and receive Jesus, who is our hope and our light.”

Hannah, her parents, and their friends started the International Friends Network, a community that gathers once a week for local immigrants who desire friendship and help with their English. A Discovery Bible Study has grown naturally out of this close-knit group, and they take turns hosting it in their homes.

Hannah is now married to a wonderful man; they have two boys and are expecting a third! While she and her growing family have moved into a larger home, a refugee couple from the International Friends Network has moved into Hannah’s previous apartment. And this couple is now watering the seeds that Hannah planted, sharing with the Gujarati in their own language.

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock” (Isaiah 26:3–4).

We’re thankful for Hannah and how her family has chosen to engage those around them. For more stories of encouragement, stay connected with us online @WomenofWelcome.



Week Two

Jochebed

“

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Hebrews 11:23

”

A silhouette of a woman balancing a child on her head against a blue sky and a rocky landscape.

Day 1

Everyday Bravery

Exodus 1:12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

When our country faced 2020 with its disruptive and (too often) deadly pandemic, contentious elections, civil unrest, and more, the stakes felt high. In many cases, they were high. Everything felt big. And yet, in a sometimes awkward way, familiar life continued. Children practiced their times tables. The buzzer on the dryer sounded while we answered work emails. We dropped birthday cards in the mailbox. History was happening both out there and very close, and it was heavy. Yet life continued on some form of autopilot, too. Sometimes our day-to-day life—our commitment to snuggles and salads, hopscotch and flashcards, laughter and tears—is a bold resistance to the darkness that threatens to overtake us.

When we meet Jochebed, the mother of Moses, she is pregnant in the midst of oppression. New life is a symbol of hope. It is a commitment to the future. Our hope is not dependent on the difficulties of our surroundings but on God alone. Romans 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

Hope in the midst of hardship requires courage.

Jochebed’s bravery is further evidenced in the uncertainty she endures during her pregnancy. Pharaoh has declared all Hebrew boys to be murdered upon birth. Without ultrasound technology, I (Sarah) can only assume she spent months of her pregnancy not knowing whether the little one in her womb was a girl who would be given the chance to live or a boy condemned to death. Living in a state of uncertainty and the unknown requires deep, faithful, and bold resolve. It is no easy task. Jochebed, with a baby in her womb, offers us an example of this everyday bravery.

QUESTIONS

What acts of oppression, violence, and uncertainty happening in the world around us have the tendency to cause you anxiety and fear?

Where are you experiencing or witnessing what feels like a hopeless situation?

What small acts of boldness in your everyday life can stand as a signal of your hope in the Lord and in a future of flourishing?

Notes:

Notes:



Day 2

Declaring Good

Exodus 2:2 The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.

Have you ever felt like everything is hopeless, that oppression and injustice seem to have run of the day? We see many examples in the psalms of cries against injustice and suffering. In Psalm 22, David writes, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel” (v. 1–3).

We recognize these words, repeated later by Jesus on the cross. I (Sarah) expect they also would’ve resonated with Jochebed, nursing an infant doomed to death and hiding him for three months. I imagine she was crying out to God for answers, for ideas, for some way out of this impossible situation. Yet even in the midst of her uncertainty and suffering, Exodus 2:2 tells us “she saw that he [Moses] was a fine child.” This recognition is reiterated in Hebrews 11 when the text says Jochebed and her husband “saw that the child was beautiful” (v. 23). In the midst of difficulty and heartbreak, this family boldly declared God’s goodness.

Author Kelley Nikondeha reflects on this scene, writing, “She recognizes that her boy is good, using the very same word God uses in describing the days of creation. Jochebed’s son possessed the deep goodness of creation, stamped with God’s own image, a boy as good as anything God ever made. Her eyes might have been tired and full of tears, but she saw clearly.”¹

¹ Kelley Nikondeha. *Defiant: What the Women of Exodus Teach Us About Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 43.

QUESTIONS

When you feel overwhelmed by the heaviness of the world, how do you tend to respond? What types of coping mechanisms are your go-tos (healthy or not)?

James 1:17 reminds us that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” God doesn’t change even when our surroundings do. Write a list of 5–7 good gifts in your life right now that reflects the goodness of God.

How can we boldly declare God's goodness in the midst of suffering without dismissing the real pain and lament we or others may be experiencing?

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[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]

Day 3

Bold Release

Exodus 2:3 When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.

Many of us grew up hearing the story over and over in church about how God protected Moses. To be honest, I (Sarah) had given hardly any thought to Jochebed's experience until I became a mother. Watching *Prince of Egypt* with my own children, I listened to Jochebed sing and cry out to God as she placed her precious child in the basket. Any of us who has ever felt backed into a corner, or has been asked by God to give up something we love, knows how excruciating it is to release what we care about so deeply.

Scripture condenses this gut-wrenching scene into one sentence, but we see Jochebed's preparation. We witness her fierceness. She was not giving up but doubling down in her commitment to protecting her baby and in her hope for his future. She creates safe transport for him with her own hands and the resources available. She assigns Miriam to follow him (Ex. 2:4). It is possible she was strategic in her release to deliver Moses to the palace in hopes he would be spared. She summons the strength of her motherhood to protect him until the final moments of her control.

Hebrews 11:1 sets the stage for "the faith chapter," which honors heroes of the faith, including Jochebed and her husband. It reads, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Jochebed's faith and hope are on full display with her bold decision to release Moses into God's care. She worked. She prepared. She released him.

QUESTIONS

Are there places in your life where God may be asking you to trust and to release the situation, relationship, decision, etc. into his care?

There are people, similar to Jochebed, who are facing impossible choices. Is there someone in your community, church, or family who comes to mind? How can you support them in difficult circumstances? Take a moment to write down your thoughts or say a prayer for them.

What do you think Jochebed felt or was thinking as she prepared the basket for Moses? Imagine an inner dialogue or perhaps a conversation with her husband. Share your thoughts with your small group or write them below.

Notes:

[illegible]

Notes:

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features 20 evenly spaced, horizontal blue lines running across the entire width of the page. The lines are thin and consistent in color, providing a guide for letter height and placement. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Day 4

Space for Lament

Psalms 13:2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

The story in Exodus doesn't tell us what Jochebed did after she "put the child in [the basket] and placed it among the reeds by the river bank" (Ex. 2:3). It notes that she leaves her older daughter Miriam to see what would happen, but Jochebed briefly disappears from the story. Was it her hope, or even a fragile plan, that Pharaoh's daughter might discover the child and request a local woman to nurse him? Even if it was, there was likely no guarantee, and it's reasonable to imagine Jochebed felt the grief of saying good-bye to her son. Perhaps she experienced the physical consequences of the sudden stop to nursing a three-month-old. How were her hormones and emotions in the wake of a stressful birth experience and the heartbreak of loss? Did she and her husband Amram support each other through this difficult season or stay quiet? What friends or relatives may have been her support system?

Jochebed's story demonstrates her boldness in the face of injustice, from her pregnancy in the midst of difficult times to her delivery of a baby boy who survived immediate death, to her hiding her son for three months, to her eventually releasing him into the river. But there is also bravery in holding the space for lament in the face of suffering. She may have cried out to God, both for Moses' rescue and protection, but perhaps also for a reversal of the tragedy and injustice that had led her to the water's edge. In *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*, author, pastor, and seminary professor Soong-Chan Rah writes, "Lament recognizes the struggles of life and cries out for justice against existing injustices. The status quo is not to be celebrated but instead must be challenged."²

² Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23.

Lamenting the injustices in the world is a bold practice that allows space for us to cry out to God about what is not right in the world while still holding onto hope. Today's reflection started out with a verse from Psalm 13 and the despairing words of David. That psalm concludes with these verses: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (Ps. 13:5-6).

QUESTIONS

Earlier this week, you listed acts of oppression, violence, and uncertainty in the world that cause you anxiety and fear. Have you ever spent time lamenting these injustices to God?

Write a prayer, laying out your laments to our God who holds the whole world—with all its beauty and brokenness—in his hands.

Notes:

[illegible]

Going Deeper

The U.S. Border Patrol Central Processing Center in McAllen, Texas, was considered “ground zero” for the family separation policies that ramped up in 2018. Women of Welcome took a group to the border to bear witness firsthand. As our group stepped into the facility, it was a jolt to witness the parents and children crammed onto benches inside pods separated by chain link fencing. The warehouse was essentially quartered into pods—one for men with children, one for women with children, one for unaccompanied boys, and one for unaccompanied girls. In the center of the cavernous room were a few port-a-potties cut off at the bottom and top so faces and feet were always visible.

I (Sarah) didn’t know where to look. Staring into the pods felt uncomfortably similar to viewing zoo animals. Of course I wanted to offer people privacy while using the restroom. So I inspected the lockers around the edge that held detainees’ personal effects. No items, including kids’ stuffed animals or toys, were allowed to the new arrivals, the Border Patrol agent explained as we walked. I looked over and zeroed in on a toddler standing near the fencing and holding onto the silver metal bench for support. He held one of the water bottles scattered throughout the pod. With intense focus, this tiny toddler moved the water bottle back and forth while his dad looked on from another bench a few feet away.

When we approached the pods of unaccompanied minors, I watched the young girls line up for lunch inside the pod. I had been asked to share about my visit to a group of middle schoolers upon my return, and I couldn’t help but see their images reflected in the drawn faces of the young girls jostling for position, helping

the little ones, and waiting to eat. My thoughts were interrupted by the Border Patrol agent who scoffed and looked down at his feet. “What kind of mother,” he began, “sends their daughter alone on a trip like that?”

I couldn’t answer. I knew two things immediately—it had to be more complicated than indifference or recklessness, and also—I could never imagine making that choice myself.

When I read the story of Jochebed, I feel like I get a small glimpse into the hearts of mothers whose children’s lives are in danger. They are facing an impossible choice. They are doing all they can—hiding, planning, strategizing. And sometimes, the only decision in front of them is to prepare the best basket they can and release their child into God’s care.

And do you know what blows me away? How Jochebed is praised for her faith in Hebrews 11. In fact, the words in verse 23 say that it was not Jochebed’s fear that motivated her actions but her faith in God’s protection and God’s provision. I am often tempted to assume that I am the protector and provider for my children, but in reality, that role belongs solely to God. The actions of Jochebed and so many women in difficult circumstances today speak of strength and faith, bravery and boldness.



Brave Story

A story graciously shared from our Women of Welcome community:

Nicole has been an immigrant twice, and she has served with an organization that worked in relief and development amid one of the largest refugee crises of our time. She volunteered in refugee resettlement in the U.S. and then with the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. She listened to and wrote stories so that donors would hopefully continue to help. As she stood looking over the vast rolling hills of the world's largest refugee camp, she thought she knew something about the vulnerability of a transitory life.

But Nicole said, "When I started listening, really listening—I realized how one-sided my knowledge was of why people leave and why people need sanctuary."

One day when she was sitting in the living room of a Bangladeshi friend, she asked about her friend's daughter who went to college in the United States.

"When I started listening, really listening—I realized how one-sided my knowledge was of why people leave and why people need sanctuary."

Her friend's eyes turned red, and she looked away. She hadn't seen her daughter since she had left for college and didn't know when or if she would see her again.

Because of their family's work with the church, their lives had been repeatedly threatened. When her daughter went to the U.S. on a student visa, she claimed and was granted asylum. She could stay in the U.S. because she had proven she feared for her life if she returned. Immigration rules had changed since, however, and her family could not even get visas to visit her.

"I saw the pain of a mother separated from her daughter, maybe forever. Yet she chose to do what was best for her child," Nicole said. "I didn't dare ask about her teenage son in the other room and what the future held for him."

Nicole considers that conversation a turning point for her, and she started listening more intently to what was happening inside our own borders. What were the laws that granted asylum? Who were we keeping out and why? This was about the same time caravans of migrants started showing up at our

southern borders and then news erupted of family separation.

Nicole says that the complexities and disagreements about immigrants and refugees sometimes feel insurmountable to her. “And yet, I won’t look away. It was right in front of me for years, and I still didn’t see it. How many of us are turning away because it doesn’t reach our front doorstep or because we can’t care about another issue?”

She often feels her attempts are feeble. But she has chosen to take several courses of action. She subscribes to newsletters that keep her up to date on changes in immigration policy. She assists here at Women of Welcome in the online community to learn more about what biblical welcome looks like in the face of a country divided over who to trust and who to let in. And she confesses she takes a deep breath as she calls her governor’s office and asks them to continue allowing refugees to be resettled in her state. She concludes, “I steady shaking hands as I share my experiences. Will I ruffle feathers? I keep returning to the words of Jesus: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’” (Matt. 25:35).

We’re thankful for Nicole and the ways she supports our Women of Welcome community. For more stories of encouragement and faith-building, stay connected with us online @WomenofWelcome.

**“I steady shaking hands
as I share my experiences.
Will I ruffle feathers? I keep
returning to the words of
Jesus:**

**‘I was a stranger and you
welcomed me’”
(Matt. 25:35).**



**Week
Three**

Miriam

“

**For I brought you up from the
land of Egypt and redeemed you
from the house of slavery, and
I sent before you Moses, Aaron,
and Miriam.**

Micah 6:4

”



Day 1 Standing By

Exodus 2:4 And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.

Can you imagine? Young Miriam is watching her baby brother being placed into a river by her mother, and she is asked to stand by and watch. Jochebed is absent from this part of the story. And I (Sarah) find myself holding my breath with Miriam as we watch what will happen to baby Moses. I can't help but imagine the emotions running through her young mind and body. Did she experience fear of what was going to happen? Was she confused by her mother's choices? Did she wonder with angst about what she was supposed to be doing exactly?

Few things are more frustrating than being put "on hold," especially when the situation feels desperate and dire. Many of us experienced this liminal space during 2020 as we watched the news, erased events from our calendars, and waited to see what the future would hold. It was unsettling and scary for many.

Yet in those moments of held breath, of not knowing, Miriam was faithful. She obeyed her mother, and she stood at a distance to watch and see what would happen. For many of us, standing by and waiting to see feels like an impossibility. We don't want to stand by and watch pain and suffering. Many of us feel drawn to two choices: busy ourselves trying to "do something" or walk away and avoid the difficult reality of standing by to watch.

But there are moments when God asks us to stand by someone who is experiencing danger or suffering. We may not know what we're supposed to do exactly, and we may feel confused and fearful. But the invitation for us is to be faithful and to walk along the river, watching and waiting. Present. Sometimes our presence is what's being asked of us. And it may not feel like enough. It may not feel effective. But as we'll see with Miriam, our faithful presence could lead us to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time.

QUESTIONS

When you are faced with others' suffering, do you find yourself drawn to "doing something" or walking away? Have you experienced moments when you know you need to just stand by?

Who in your life may need you to stand by, watch, and wait to see what happens? What does this kind of solidarity look like practically?


What does it mean to trust God in that waiting moment? Write out a prayer releasing a person or situation you are watching and ask for strength and faithfulness as you stand by, ready to help when needed.

Notes:

[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]



Day 2 Speaking Up

Exodus 2:7 Then [Moses'] sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"

This was it. The baby had been pulled out of the river by arguably one of the most powerful women in the land. Moses was crying, and Miriam had to think quickly and act boldly. She had only been instructed to watch and see what would happen. Should she do anything else?

Miriam spoke up. She had walked alongside Moses, waiting and standing by, not knowing exactly what, if anything, she should be doing. But when the moment was right, she stepped up and spoke up to Pharaoh's own daughter. I (Sarah) wonder how Miriam experienced this moment. Pounding adrenaline as she dangerously broke through society's barriers and risked speaking up to a powerful woman with the hope of saving her brother? Deep fear that she was doing the wrong thing, potentially risking his life or angering her mother or the princess? A simmering anger that the very family who had put her brother in danger now held the power to save him?

When we are faithful to the unique assignments we've been given, we may just find ourselves available in the moment when a bold move is required. I am reminded of another woman of Scripture, Esther, whose assignment may have seemed much more glamorous but which also put her in a position that required her to speak up. When she reminded Mordecai that if she spoke up in defense of the Jews, she might be killed, he responded, "If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Miriam was standing by for such a time as this too. Her boldness to speak up to power in defense of the vulnerable was heard and opened the door to restore this family torn apart by violence and injustice.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever been in a situation when you knew in your gut that you needed to speak up on behalf of someone else? Share about that experience.

What holds you back from speaking up or causes you to consider before you do? Do any of the responses imagined for Miriam's or Esther's hesitation resonate?

How might this story have been different if Miriam had stayed quiet?

Notes:

[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]



Day 3 Taking Action

Exodus 2:8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother."

First, Miriam was instructed to stay behind and watch. Now, she is commanded to go. She is brave in both, and her faithfulness facilitates a restoration beyond our imagination when we first began the story. Miriam acts as a connection point between this woman of power and privilege and Jochebed, the slave woman whose baby is in the princess's arms. We don't know if Miriam had been instructed to volunteer Jochebed to nurse Moses or if she initiated that restorative idea herself, but through her quick action and divine suggestion, she is able to reunite her mother and the child in a stunning turn of events.

Something beautiful and holy happens when people of different backgrounds come together for the flourishing of others. Among Jesus' disciples, we find Matthew the tax collector and Peter the fisherman, who were Jesus' close followers and leaders of the early church. Also, not to be overlooked are the many women who traveled with them, several who were wealthy and covered the group's expenses (Luke 8:2-3). All these different characters were important for supporting Jesus' ministry.

Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army and a pioneer for women of faith, is noted for saying, "If we are to better the future, we must disturb the present." This idea might make some of us who'd rather lay low feel uncomfortable. But there is a future designed by God that requires us to speak up and act when needed. Miriam bravely jumped into the moment and created a better future for her brother. Her bold actions built a bridge between two women who both had a significant role to play in the rescue of baby Moses.

QUESTIONS

Which of Miriam's actions—standing by, speaking up, or taking action—come most easily to you? Which ones require more from you?

Is there a situation in your life currently where you feel it may be time to take brave action?

As you consider areas of suffering or injustice that draw your attention, are there any unconventional partnerships where you could build bridges to care for others together? What would this kind of coalition building require from you?

Notes:

[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]

Day 4

Praising God

Exodus 15:20-21 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

The story of Moses’ infant rescue happens quickly in Exodus. In fact, just a few verses after Miriam speaks up to Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses has grown up and witnesses the mistreatment of the Hebrew people, his people. Not long after, Moses leads the Israelite people out of Egypt with his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam leading by his side (Micah 6:4). In Exodus 15, they have just crossed the Red Sea and are singing praises to God. Hers is a brief hymn, but in it, we still witness an incredible testimony of God’s power.

One commentator describes Miriam’s song this way: “The reason for praise of Yahweh, the incomparable one, is quite specific. Yahweh has overcome the seemingly invincible power of armed might that enforced aggression.”³ When we consider the rescues Miriam has witnessed—at Moses’ birth and also as the people crossed the river on dry land—it’s not hard to imagine her passionate praise and deep belief that God can rescue those in need from those armed with power and violence.

Most of the time we assume we’ll experience joy in a future moment. But can we rejoice in the midst of the pain and suffering that is in the world? Miriam’s song testifies to the discipline of celebration. Their journey was not over. More suffering was in the future for the Israelites. However, she had witnessed God’s power to overcome those who seemingly held all the advantage. It was crucial to praise God for supernatural rescue in the present and to mark the moment as a reminder during future hardships of what God can do.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:802.

QUESTIONS

When we are walking alongside those in vulnerable, difficult situations, do we take the time to truly celebrate the wins? Or do we move quickly on to the next fight?

Remember a time you witnessed God showing up for those in need. What did you experience?

Write a prayer of praise, celebrating the ways God has defeated injustice and rescued the vulnerable.

Notes:

[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]

Going Deeper

Pharaoh's decree said nothing about Hebrew girls. Miriam was impacted by the violence because Moses was her brother. When injustice hits close to home, our involvement and advocacy become extremely personal. Many of the biggest advocates for immigrants and refugees are in personal relationships with people directly impacted by these systems. Sometimes, looking at immigration and refugee issues from a distance can feel looming and overwhelming. It may feel easier to walk away and not get involved. We might even wonder if it's worth it to push back against such injustices.

Poet and musician Micah Bournes has a spoken word video he created in partnership with World Relief that addresses this very question: "Is justice worth it?" If you haven't seen it (or want to watch it again), take a couple minutes and watch it on YouTube: Micah Bournes - Is Justice Worth It? You will not regret it!

Bournes writes, "It's one thing to wonder if someone else's freedom is worth fighting for, but when you begin to identify with that someone else, commune with them, that's when the question is no longer worth asking . . . I don't care how long it takes, I don't care how many times we fail, I don't care how little progress is made. You never stop fighting for your own."⁴ You never stop fighting for your own. Miriam did not give up on her baby brother as she stood at the riverbank.

⁴ Streddernaut, "Is Justice Worth It? - feat. Micah Bournes [World Relief]," June 18, 2013, video, 2:09, <https://youtu.be/fpl84D-uNmY>.

The invitation for us as believers is to recognize our oneness in the Body of Christ, to recognize that the suffering facing immigrants and refugees in our country is impacting our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Church is a mixed-status family that includes U.S. citizens, undocumented immigrants, "Dreamers," asylum seekers, legal permanent residents, refugees, naturalized citizens, those with temporary protected status (TPS), and more.

Our siblings are in danger, just like Miriam's was. Her life was spared, but she stepped up for her brother. The invitation for us is to enter into personal relationships with those impacted by policies and rhetoric and allow what once felt like a distant, looming issue to come into our homes. We are asked to walk along the riverbanks, ready and waiting to support whenever and wherever we can. And when we feel like giving up, we will be compelled to keep going because we have joy, solidarity, and strength in community.



Brave Story

A story graciously shared from our Women of Welcome community:

Kristin found that Africa had always intrigued her, and she had imagined that someday she would move there to work in an orphanage. Part of that dream became a reality when she and her husband adopted their first son from Ethiopia in 2010. She discovered after adopting Daniel that she fell in love with the Ethiopian culture and people, which has indelibly become a part of the fabric of their family. She has traveled back several times over the last decade, and she and her husband added a teenager to their family from there as well.

Kristin says of those early days, “Ben spoke no English, and his early safety net in America was all the Ethiopian food, music, and shows he could absorb. As much as he envisioned America to be the ‘land of opportunity’ and a family to be his savior, he found everything here to be foreign, scary, and uncomfortable. He jumped into public school where he was placed in ESL classes with unsympathetic teachers who commanded: ‘Speak English!’”

She and her husband struggled to help Ben not only communicate but also work through trauma, to understand “family,” and the reality that life in America is hard. Racism and name-calling from his peers at the predominantly white school made it difficult for him. While Kristin and her husband were always ready to advocate on his behalf, they also realized how difficult it must be for other students in his ESL class who do not go home to English-speaking parents.

“This realization that started with two international adoptions resulted in me seeing the need to be proximate to those on the margins right where I lived. In traveling across the globe to Africa multiple times to grow our family, God allowed me to see immigrant neighbors right down my street,” Kristin adds.

**“Being a woman of welcome
has meant being the type of
friend I want to have, especially
if I was in their shoes.”**

Since then, she has read many books detailing the experience of immigrants who “choose” to come to America, and she recognizes the complexity of reasons, the danger involved, and the brokenness of a system. However, she is quick to point out that “People are not a system. When

immigrants are mentioned in the news, it is in regard to border security and the threat they pose to ‘us.’”

She does not live near any border, and the immigrants she sees and knows are just trying to live normal lives. She says, “They are ‘us.’ They work incredibly hard, pay taxes, go to church, love their neighbors, and value their lives here. By and large, their main priority is for their children to have a future that is free of violence, poverty, and despair.” Sadly, she says they accept that America is not “theirs” and that they may be “guests” here for as long as they are careful and remain hidden.

For Kristin, being a safe person that immigrant friends can trust and rely upon means extending her availability to them in many ways: going to check on the price of a car or apartment rental because there is a risk that they will be treated unfairly; helping out with childcare; celebrating birthdays; swapping recipes; sharing meals; and taking long walks together.

She concludes, “Being a woman of welcome has meant being the type of friend I want to have, especially if I was in their shoes.”

She feels that being a woman of welcome also means advocating for a better system: “It means changing laws so a driver’s license is more accessible. It means shining a light on unlawful profiling of drivers in immigrant communities. It means learning about and helping my immigrant friends understand their rights. It means speaking out against family separation and unethical practices at detention centers. And it means seeking and supporting a path to citizenship for people who are the most ‘American’ I know because they chose it.”

We’re thankful for Kristin and how her family has chosen to engage those around them. For more stories of encouragement and faith-building, stay connected with us online @WomenofWelcome.

**“...it means seeking
and supporting a path
to citizenship for
people who are the
most ‘American’ I know
because they chose it.”**



Week Four

Pharaoh's Daughter

“

**Shout for joy, you heavens;
rejoice, you earth; burst into
song, you mountains! For the
Lord comforts his people and
will have compassion on his
afflicted ones.**

Isaiah 49:13 (NIV)

”



Day 1

Extraordinary Compassion

Exodus 2:5–6 Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”

Throughout this study we’ve seen women making bold moves to save lives because of their faith. But what about other women in the community, the ones who weren’t loyal to the one true God?

I (Bri) wonder what the Egyptian women must have been thinking during the genocide of innocent children in their region. It’s highly unlikely that Pharaoh’s daughter mingled with Hebrews in the community, but it’s possible that some of her servants were Hebrews. Though her life was privileged and mostly isolated with other Egyptian royalty, verse 6 indicates that she was aware of her father’s decree.

Egyptians believed the Nile to be sacred, a river of health and life-giving properties, yet it was also the river in which children were intentionally killed. Egyptian royalty had special bathing rooms in their palaces—filled with water from the Nile—but it was common to bathe in the river itself as well. In doing so, during this season of genocide, it’s likely Pharaoh’s daughter would have often seen evidence of her father’s edict in the river. Death was surely present and impossible to avoid completely, even if her servants were on the lookout along the riverbank.

Upon hearing the cries of a child still alive, she summoned her servants to investigate.

From his circumstance to his circumcision, he clearly was a Hebrew child, and she took pity on him. (The word for pity in verse 6 can also be translated as compassion.)

With her servants standing witness to the scene, what should she do? Place the baby back in the basket, as if she'd never heard him, or save the child's life? What would her family think? What would her father say? Her thoughts must have been racing.

There she stood, face to face with the victim of her father's cruelty. Her proximity to the pain of this Hebrew baby in her arms must have triggered something in her heart.

Scripture doesn't tell us if she felt conflicted about her compassion, only that she simply acted on it.

QUESTIONS


Have you ever had compassion toward something or someone that felt complicated? What was so complicated about the situation? What did your compassion lead you to do?

Can you remember a time in your life when you had to rely on the mercy of a stranger (or an enemy)?

Read Psalm 103:1–13. What model does Christ give us to follow in these verses? Take some time to pray about where God is calling you to act with extraordinary compassion.

Notes:

[illegible]



Day 2

Facing the Unthinkable

Exodus 2:7–8 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother.

Pharaoh's daughter and her servants must have been stunned.

What they had found they now had to face.

A vulnerable child was crying in the river—the same river where other children had not survived. Was he hungry or sick? Where was his mother? None of them were able to nurse (that we know of), and bringing him back to the palace seemed unthinkable.

Or was it?

It's pretty common for daughters at some point in their lives to assert their own will against even the kindest of fathers. But defying a pharaoh was surely unlike any modern-day teenage rebellion.

As the chief justice of the royal court, the supreme commander of the army, and the high priest of all religion, pharaohs were divine kings in Egyptian culture. They were considered to be the mediator between the gods and man, carrying complete authority on all aspects of life. The "right" things in Egyptian culture were defined by what Pharaoh loved, and the "wrong/unworthy" things were defined by what he hated.

With no previous history or relationship with Joseph (Ex. 1:8), Pharaoh hated the ever-growing Hebrew people. Therefore, all Egyptians were to follow suit. Egyptian citizens benefited from this kind of reign and religious culture, making it even more reasonable for them to fall in line.

But the royal family—including Pharaoh's daughter—would have been the most loyal of followers of Pharaoh's wishes. Pharaoh's daughter likely didn't know or

worship God, but God used her (an outsider) and her extraordinary compassion to save his people. The irony of this story is inescapable. The evil plans set in motion by the most powerful person in the region were soon eroded by the compassion of his own daughter.

Throughout Scripture we see how the unfolding of God's sovereign plans has always included unlikely characters. As Christians we believe and trust in His sovereignty. It's what gives us hope when the world's evil seems unrelenting.

QUESTIONS

Reflect/share about a time in which you found yourself in a situation you couldn't simply turn away from. What did you do? How did God show up in that situation?

When you look back on your life, where are the points in your journey you can undoubtedly recognize God's sovereignty?

What other Bible stories mention "outsiders" who protected God's people or helped further the plans of God?

Notes:

[illegible]

Day 3

Holding Out Hope

Exodus 2:9 And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:12

Trusting God can be a difficult thing, especially when life has taken an unexpected turn. Ever found yourself there? Feeling blindsided and thinking, “God, don’t you love me? I thought you were for me.”

I’m sure Jochebed and Miriam felt this way. They were Israelites, the chosen people of God. Why was this happening to them? What had they done to deserve such cruelty and indifference from God? I (Bri) can only imagine how these Hebrew mothers felt—such anger and bitter disbelief at how God could allow such things.

In Genesis God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be numerous and become a great nation. But the circumstances in Egypt under Pharaoh at this time surely dispelled any notion of that promise coming to fruition. Families were literally being ripped apart, their descendants intentionally snuffed out. It must have been impossible to hold onto hope.

But we know how this particular story ends.

While suffering was ever-present, God was working.

Amid their heartache, an inroad was quietly made into the very household that created their pain.

The midwives, Jochebed, and Miriam all held out hope that somehow their God would intervene. And he did. Pharaoh’s daughter never could have known how much her sympathy and compassion would change the course of events in

Egypt. And while her father diligently worked to eliminate all potential threats to the kingdom (male children), women were making bold moves and choosing brave faith in God. It was their collective faithfulness that would soon provide relief—an actual exodus—for the people of God.

QUESTIONS

How do you personally resonate with Proverbs 13:12?

Head over to Matthew 6:33–34. Why is it so difficult to steady this verse in our hearts?

What encouragement does Isaiah 41:10–13 give?

Make a list of things you continue to hold out hope for. Take some time to pray for the faith to trust God with all of these desires.

Notes:

[illegible]



Day 4

Choosing to Trust

Exodus 2:10 When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Have you ever made the choice to trust God and then everything around you seemed to fall apart? Jochebed had trusted God with the life of her three-month-old son. Now that he was three years old, she found herself having to bravely release him once more. The years must have flown by, as most baby-toddler years do. The day she was to meet Pharaoh's daughter must have hit hard. How could she possibly do this again?

Though the past few years of holding Moses in her arms were evidence of God's faithfulness, how could she muster the resolve to do this? The crocodile-infested waters of the Nile must have seemed less dangerous than placing him now into the hands of the very family that sought to kill him. "Lord, is there another way? Will Pharaoh's daughter hug and kiss him? Will she defend him and care for him? Will she try to erase his Hebrew heritage? Will he forget me?" A thousand thoughts must have occupied her mind in those years. And when the day came to give Moses to the princess, she had no assurance of anything.

Sometimes trusting God is painful.

And when you're trapped in pain, sometimes you honestly don't care what God has done for you in the past. In fact, sometimes all his previous acts of faithfulness can seem insignificant or even cruel. You might think, "Lord, what was the point? What was it all for?" I'm sure Jochebed felt this way.

God had a plan to save Moses and the Israelites, but how could Jochebed have known any of this? She couldn't have.

So what should we do in times like this—when we know a bold act of faith is needed, but we're too angry or frightened to move forward? The answer might

seem too simple. But the truth is, sometimes the boldest thing we can do is choose to remember well. In doing so, we defy the very thing that pains us or prevents us from moving forward. Remembering well moves us from a place of fear to a place of trust.

Think back to the bold decisions of the women in this study:

Shiphrah and Puah defied a king and were blessed.

Jochebed trusted God and it saved her son.

Miriam spoke up and it reunited her family.

Pharaoh's daughter showed compassion and it saved a nation.

Each of these women took a brave step forward, doing what they knew was right and good in the face of intense fear and uncertainty. Each of them had a unique part to play in God's redemptive story.

I (Bri) know it can be scary to move forward without assurances.

I know that choosing bold actions and brave faith will cost you something.

It always does.

But Hebrews 13:6 tells us, "So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

You can do brave things.

Put one foot in front of the other and bathe it all in prayer.

You're not alone. You have the legacy of bold women who have gone before you and saw God show up in ways they never could have imagined.

I'm confident he will show up for you too.

"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21).

QUESTIONS

Write down at least one brave act of faith you'd like to take in the next month.

**Open your Bible and read Psalm 33,
and then read Hebrews 13.**

What confidence and hope do these passages give as you start to make bold steps forward?

Notes:

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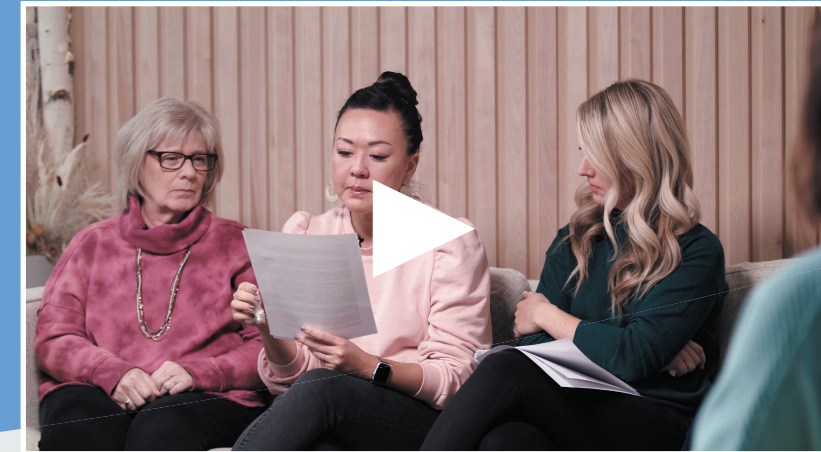
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Going Deeper

In the summer of 2017, “Zero Tolerance,” an extreme family separation policy, was piloted at several sectors of the Texas/Mexico border in an effort to deter migrant families from coming to the border. This program was officially announced by the Department of Justice on April 6, 2018, and it continued until Christians and other Americans raised their voices for this policy to stop. The policy was ordered to cease in June of 2018, but widespread reports raised flags that family separation was still happening in some cases. In 2019, a group of lawyers visited two facilities in Texas along the U.S./Mexico border as part of a routine evaluation of the conditions in immigration detention. Customs and Border Protection officers randomly selected children and brought them to a conference room to meet with these lawyers.

Many of the lawyers had visited immigration detention centers multiple times during their careers. However, it was the first time that they saw conditions that were so concerning—violating so many protection policies—that they decided to break their confidentiality agreements and take these stories to the press. When they put these stories into the public domain, they redacted all identifying information to protect the identity of the children,



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which is why some stories have missing words and initials instead of actual names.

The zero tolerance policy was ordered to end in 2018, but some of these stories captured in 2019 confirm that family separation still occurred.

Sometimes simply choosing to listen to someone’s story is a brave step of faith.

Sometimes the most effective way to save a life is to engage with realities you’d rather ignore.

While in Our Care is a series of videos that we hope you’ll find the courage to watch. In these videos you’ll hear Christian women from our Women of Welcome community read the sworn testimonies of these children held in the custody of the United States government. They brave these hard-to-hear stories together and as a group ask honest and important questions in an effort to learn more about their place in it all.

(Videos available: May 2021)



Brave Story

A story graciously shared from our Women of Welcome community:

A few years ago, God began to stir in Vicki's heart about what it looks like to be "pro-life." Or, as she would say, "holistically pro-life." Prior to that, her strong pro-life views could be neatly summed up as advocating for the unborn as well as ministering to a legion of hurting women burdened with shame over a past abortion, as she identified with them on a very personal level.

Then a seismic shift began when she wrestled with the irony that protecting life within the womb was a deal-breaker for many Christians, but protecting existing lives outside the womb was not a priority of equal importance. She numbered herself among them. Gradually, however, she began to notice other vulnerable populations in need of advocacy and protection. She describes this process: "Maybe it was the heartbreaking images of refugee children washed up on shorelines, some cradled in the arms of a desperate parent who simply wanted a chance at a new life. Or the reports of immigrant children being separated from their families at the border and held in prison-like

cages. In the wake of this realization, I was left with some big questions, the most important being the question of our responsibility as Christians to extend compassion (and assistance) to those seeking asylum from dangerous, life-threatening situations."

Grieved that Christians were becoming more known for their unloving rhetoric and opposition than their loving compassion and assistance, she decided to become a small part of the solution. So she registered to train as a volunteer with Refugee Services of Texas at the beginning of 2019. She says that her work with refugees over the past two years has been a life-changing experience. "God has used it to remind me that every person has a story and every life matters. As God has challenged me to think outside the boundaries of my previously compartmentalized pro-life views, he continues to stir my heart with the plight of refugees and immigrants, most of whom are fleeing horrendous situations related to extreme poverty, war, or religious persecution. My refugee friends have inspired me to love God more deeply and serve him more boldly. They have taught me so much in regard to simplicity, gratitude, joy, perseverance, and courage."

She has grown particularly close to a family of four from Burma who came to the U.S. in February 2020. She is currently teaching the mother English and excited to see her progress. One day, she surprised Vicki with a delicious rice dish and Burmese tea as a thank-you. Sometimes Vicki takes one or more of her grandchildren with her, and she feels one of her greatest joys is watching them play with her children. "My four-year-old grandson, Micah, and her four-year-old daughter, Lylydah, chatter back and forth, each in their own language, and I am convinced that they understand each other perfectly! Hearing their laughter and watching them love without hesitation or any shred of prejudice gives me so much hope for the future."

In 2019, Women of Welcome invited her to be part of a border trip to El Paso (situated along the border of Texas and Mexico). Many of these

Christian women on the trip were very much like Vicki—in the process of expanding their pro-life views.

During this trip, Vicki met Pastor Maribel Velazquez whose small church, El Elyon, took in about 70 migrants each day for several months straight when the surge of migrants showed up at the border between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Pastor Maribel converted their small sanctuary into a shelter filled with cots donated by the Salvation Army to accommodate the influx of migrants seeking asylum. They would be dropped off by ICE day after day, and she and a small group of volunteers did their best to feed and shelter them, while helping each one connect with a family member already here in the States. They had to do so quickly before the next group arrived and they began the process all over.

Pastor Maribel gave Vicki a tour of her church and showed her a corner of the foyer that, prior to taking in the migrant families, had been remodeled into a coffee bar for church attendees. She was so proud of the new coffee bar, but could not say ‘no’ when she heard about the migrants sleeping under the border bridge due to a lack of space after they were processed. She could have easily ignored the situation and carried on, business as usual, serving her small congregation and welcoming them on Sunday mornings with a trendy coffee bar in the foyer. Vicki said, “Seeing those green cots stacked up ceiling-high in the corner of her coffee station reminded me of the real mission of the church. Would my church have said ‘no’ to ‘loving the stranger?’ Would yours? I hope not, but I have to wonder.”

Pastor Maribel’s stories of her work with the migrants gave Vicki insight about the circumstances that cause a person (or a family) to flee the only home they have ever known and risk their lives on a perilous journey that offers no guarantees in return. One father was fleeing with his young daughter whom gang members had threatened to rape the following day if he didn’t pay them

the sum of money they demanded. Since it had happened to other families, this father knew they would follow through with their threats if he didn’t pay up. He fled with her that day to protect her.

Vicki shared another poignant story from Pastor Maribel about a woman who was sobbing inconsolably on a cot in a corner of her church. She attempted to comfort her and offered to pray with her. The woman eventually opened up and shared her story, choking back her tears. Her husband was already here in the U.S. and had worked and finally saved enough money to pay a “coyote” (a migrant smuggler) to bring her and their baby over (they, too, were facing dangerous gang activity in their country).

As part of the journey, she was ushered onto a speedboat where they were packed in like sardines to cross to the next point. The coyote warned that they would be going very fast and to hang on tight because if anything fell out of the boat, they wouldn’t be able to turn around and retrieve it. They hit a large wave, and so many people bumped into the woman that her baby was knocked out of her arms and went overboard.

Vicki said, “I couldn’t hold back the tears as I thought about this mother, who likely considered jumping overboard in that moment to a sure and certain death. While most of us will never have to recover from a trauma of that magnitude, let’s not forget the original trauma that led her to embark on the dangerous journey in the first place. No one in their right mind leaves the only home they’ve ever known and risks a perilous journey to reach the border of our country unless staying in their country becomes the greater risk. Many of us have believed a false narrative about refugees and immigrants, and only by daring to open our eyes and our ears will we truly understand the situation.”

An unforgettable personal experience occurred at a portion of the border wall, where Vicki and the Women of Welcome group encountered a surreal sight: Two women on the other side were rummaging through a trash heap.

The women approached the fence and engaged in conversation with the group. They shared that they were mothers, one with three children and the other with seven children, and prior to the fence being built, used to cross over freely to get groceries and return back home. They expressed fears of not being able to feed their children or protect them from harm. Vicki said, “We asked them if we could pray for them, and they readily accepted our offer. As we reached through the metal beams of the border fence and clasped their hands and collectively bowed our heads in prayer, that ominous fence disappeared for those few moments.”

Reflecting on her trip, Vicki said, “I don’t know exactly what God is calling me to do in the aftermath of what I’ve seen and heard, but this much I do know: When I was willing to open my eyes to see and open my ears to hear, it wasn’t hard to open my heart and respond in compassion and Christ-like love. In fact, it came quite naturally.”

She has also been mulling over something that Bri Stensrud, the director of Women of Welcome, said on the trip, “You cannot scripturally justify prioritizing one vulnerable population over another.”

Vicki says that advocating for the unborn and “loving the stranger” are not mutually exclusive. They exist under the same “pro-life” umbrella because every person is made in the image of God and deserves to be treated as such. “One life is not more valuable than another, and if we are to be truly pro-life, we must be “pro-every-life,” from the womb to the tomb. We can open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and respond with love and compassion, just as Jesus did. At the end of the day, I would rather err on the side of loving too much than not enough.”

We’re thankful for Vicki and how her family has chosen to engage those around them. For more stories of encouragement and faith-building, stay connected with us online @WomenofWelcome.

You can do brave things.

**Go forward in the
boldness of Christ.**

**“Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous. Do
not be frightened, and do not be
dismayed, for the Lord your God
is with you wherever you go.”
– Joshua 1:9**

B O L D + B R A V E

