

# 18 POWERFUL WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

Scripture Passages,  
Reflections &  
Compassionate Prayers

SARAH THOMAS TRACY



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## INTRODUCTION

**D**id you know that there are more than 300 named and nameless women mentioned in the Bible? But who is counting? What matters is that the women count; they are invaluable to our salvation history. From Eve to the Bride, God's saving love is manifested through women. Just as women play sometimes subtle yet always significant roles in the Scriptures, they continue to do so in our lives today.

I invite you to meet some of the women of the Bible noted in these prayers. You may want to begin your day by reading one of these reflections and praying for the women in today's society of whom the passage speaks. You may even find yourself called to name and pray for specific women in your life. As we offer up the needs of countless women, may we be assured that, although our society does not always value their worth, our God surely treasures all women.

LET'S COUNT THE WOMEN

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## The Women Present in the Crowd

*Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled...And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.* MATTHEW 14:19-21

### PAUSE & REFLECT

There are a few miracles in this gospel passage known as the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. The obvious one is that five loaves of bread and two fish fed a crowd of at least five thousand men—not counting women and children—to the point of satisfaction. And there were leftovers! Another miracle may be that as the baskets of food were passed among the crowd, people shared what little they may have had with them, adding to the bounty. A third, striking miracle is that no one went away hungry. The five thousand men and uncounted women and children ate and were satisfied.

### HEAR OUR PRAYER...

Jesus, our Bread of Life, today there are multitudes who suffer from starvation and food insecurity. We pray especially for single mothers: women who comfort their malnourished children, women who ignore their own hunger pangs and weakness to feed their children with what little they have. May the miracle of sharing our gifts and resources with our sisters and brothers take root so that all will be fed to the point of satisfaction. Amen.

## LET'S SHARE OUR TREASURES

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### The Poor Widow

*He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." LUKE 21:1-4*

#### **PAUSE & REFLECT**

Most of the widows we meet in the Bible are recipients, not givers. They are subjects of compassion, mercy, even pity. Widows are dependent upon others for their survival. The widow whom Jesus meets—a woman who is poor herself—is a giver. And for that reason, she makes many of us uncomfortable. She does not give of her excess; she gives from her own need. Unlike most people, she offers what she cannot spare. We may say, "I have an extra \$20 bill in my wallet. I'll put that in the donation box. Here's that old winter coat that I haven't worn in years. I'll bring it to the Red Cross bin. I have more cans of soup in my cupboard than I can eat. I'll bring a couple of the extra ones to the food pantry." Seldom do we donate our last \$20, our single winter coat, or the only food we have left. We tend to donate from our abundance.

#### **HEAR OUR PRAYER...**

We pray for the women in our cities and neighborhoods who sleep in shelters, dine in soup kitchens, and shop at food pantries. Like the widow in the Bible, these women make us uncomfortable: we fear that we, too, may suffer from the injus-

tices of poverty. And so, we make ourselves feel better by giving to them. Yet, we are challenged to give of our treasure—not solely our earthly treasure. We thank the “poor widows” of today who remind us that we are called to dig deep into our hearts, to empty ourselves of all that God has given us: compassion, kindness, respect, love. Amen.

LET'S WELCOME ALL  
OF GOD'S CHILDREN

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## The Samaritan Woman

*The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”*

JOHN 4:9-10

### PAUSE & REFLECT

This woman from Samaria has a questionable lifestyle: she has had five husbands and she is not married to her current partner. She is an outcast in her village. She approaches the well at noon, when the other women have already drawn their water at a cooler time of day and returned home, so she would not have to hear their insults or see their judging glances. To her dismay, she is not alone at the well. There is a man there: a Jewish man who dares to break the law and speak to her, a Samaritan. He is gentle and kind; he knows of her past and

her lifestyle and yet he is tender and accepting. He does not condemn her; no, he blesses her by revealing himself as the Christ. She is freed from shame.

**HEAR OUR PRAYER...**

We pray for mothers who struggle with their children's gender identity and sexual orientation. Mothers whose children suffer from the isolation, condemnation, and insults that the Samaritan woman endured. Women who love their children so deeply and who always will love them, no matter what. Yet, these women find themselves conflicted when faced with Church doctrine. May these women and their children meet the tender, accepting Jesus at the well and drink of his life-giving water. While others judge and isolate, we pray that these mothers and their LGBTQ+ children will experience Jesus' embracing, inclusive love through their neighbors, fellow parishioners, coworkers, and loved ones. In the words of Pope Francis to parents of LGBTQ+ individuals, "God loves your children as they are because they are the children of God." Amen.

LET'S SPEAK THE TRUTH

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## Anna

*There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. LUKE 2:36-38*

### PAUSE & REFLECT

Anna, the prophetess of God: an elderly woman who lived many years alone as a widow. A woman who gained strength, knowledge, and confidence through the years. A woman of deep faith who knew the Hebrew Scriptures and who had the prophetic wisdom to recognize the Christ Child. Anna, a woman of grace and intuition. Anna, your age gained you a place in society; your slow gait, wrinkled complexion, and gray hair personified your wisdom.

Our world recently suffered the horrors of a pandemic: over six million people have died; jobs have been lost; children have missed valuable classroom time. But something else happened in the modern world: lockdowns kept women from hair salons and spas. Women have allowed their visible signs of aging to be revealed. Our graying hair and wrinkles around our eyes are noticeable.

### HEAR OUR PRAYER...

We pray to you, Anna the Prophetess: may women who are advanced in years embrace the truth of who they are, acknowledging the wisdom they have gained through the years. Like Anna, we, too, are women of grace and intuition. Our years give us the self-confidence to speak the truth that lives in our hearts. Like Anna, we recognize the Christ in our midst while others' eyes are closed. We pray that we will follow you, our sister Anna, and challenge the false whisperings that echo in our world by speaking aloud the truth. May our world hear and ponder the prophetic wisdom of our wise, experienced women. Amen.

### LET'S THANK OUR FRIENDS

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## Ruth and Naomi

*So [Naomi] said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"* RUTH 1:15-18

### PAUSE & REFLECT

This passage that retells the conversation between Ruth (derived from the Hebrew word *re'ut*, meaning "friend"), and her mother-in-law, Naomi (meaning "pleasantness"), is often



read at wedding ceremonies. Ruth's selfless promise to walk through life with Naomi and Naomi's God is a vow full of hope, love, and loyalty. The relationship between Ruth and Naomi personifies God's loving kindness. These two women embody God's call to practice *hesed*: steadfast love. While there are many differences between Naomi and Ruth—age, religion, culture—their tragic losses unite them. Above all, their love transcends all differences.

**HEAR OUR PRAYER...**

We pray with gratitude for our women friends, for our "Ruths." We may experience loving and being loved by a spouse, our children, parents, or siblings, but a friendship between women is a unique bond. The gift of a woman friend, while not rare, is to be cherished. A woman friend is a mirror, reflecting back to us our own strengths, joys, tears, and hopes. A woman friend shows us how to love ourselves as she loves us. Above all, a woman friend shows us how to love ourselves as God loves us. In her 1995 book *She Who Dwells Within*, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb wrote about Ruth and Naomi's friendship: "God in this story does not reveal himself from a bush or a mountain or a dream or direct speech. Rather the presence of God is manifest through the love and caring of one woman for another."

Thank you, Lord, for those women who bring your loving kindness and steadfast love to my life. Amen.