



A BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

*Praying*

WITH

WOMEN

OF THE

BIBLE

FOR 30 DAYS

SHERRY HARNEY

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HarperChristian  
Resources

*Praying with Women of the Bible for 30 Days*

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# INTRODUCTION

## **A WALK ALONG THE OCEAN WITH JESUS AND HANNAH**

Two thousand miles is a long way! I grew up in Holland, Michigan, and by God's grace we had the joy of serving a church and raising our three sons in a neighboring city a short distance from my childhood home. My parents were able to be engaged with our family, most of my childhood friends still lived in the area, and for a decade and a half my husband and I served a loving and healthy local church just thirty minutes from Holland.

## **LIFE WAS GOOD**

Then, everything began to change. One by one, our boys grew into young men and headed off to college. Los Angeles, Chicago, and a university in Michigan became home for Zach, Josh, and Nate, respectively. I missed them more than I could have imagined. Thankfully, I had the stability and security of hundreds of relationships built over a lifetime, and all of them were just across town or a short drive away.

## **UNTIL EVERYTHING CHANGED**

God's call came with clarity, and both my husband, Kevin, and I knew what we had to do. We packed our belongings, our life, and our hearts and moved them all two thousand miles away to Monterey, California. The people at our new church were loving and sweet, and new friendships were forged. The West Coast was beautiful.

## **AND I WAS STILL LONELY**

I sensed the Holy Spirit directing me to read Psalm 23 at the start of every day. I obeyed this spiritual nudging, which gave me some spiritual encouragement and perspective. But there was still a growing ache deep in my soul. In the past I had faced heartache, just like every human being does in life, but I

had never experienced this kind of loss. It descended like a dark cloud, and I could not seem to pull out of it. I did not have the skills needed to climb out of the pit I was descending into.

About three months into this difficult season, I knew something needed to change as the trajectory of my emotional life took a downward turn. Since I grew up in the church and loved the Bible, I looked for a friend who understood pain, sorrow, and long-term discouragement. The Holy Spirit brought Hannah to mind. Sure, she lived millennia before me, but I was drawn to her journey of suffering. I read her story, as told in the book of 1 Samuel, and decided I needed to devote some time to meditating on her journey of pain and honest communication with God. After doing that, I knew I had to come before the Lord, like Hannah, and be brutally honest with how I felt.

I decided to take a walk along the coast. Just me, Jesus, and Hannah's story. There is a walking trail weaving for mile after mile between the Pacific Coast Highway and the ocean. I decided in my heart to walk until something happened in my soul.

I needed help. I was desperate.

Have you ever been there?

Are you there today?

As I walked, I talked with Jesus. I meditated on Hannah's struggle, so deep she had no words but only groans. I was not tracking time, but after walking for several miles, praying and groaning to God, I ran into a couple of women along the trail. They were providing water for people doing a training run for an upcoming marathon along that very route. They were kind and friendly, and we struck up a conversation. I had no idea that the Holy Spirit had placed them there to add their voices to the ministry that Jesus and Hannah were doing in my heart.

These two women were so kind that I shared some of my story with them and why I was on this long walk that was now paralleling the people training for the marathon. I told them of the recent move and how much I missed my family, friends, and old life in Michigan. They listened intently and then

probed a bit. “How old are your boys?” I told them and explained that they were scattered at three different schools in three different states, and none of them lived in Monterey with us.

Both women had very knowing looks on their faces. It turns out that each of them had gone through the empty-nesting process and had experienced similar loss and emotions. They validated my pain and assured me that most moms experience similar struggles in this unique season.

My sorrow did not instantly disappear. But as I turned around and began the walk back to my car, I sensed I was also making an emotional and spiritual turn toward hope. These ladies were part of the answer to my prayer. I had no idea that this was one of the primary sources of my struggle. They gave me clarity and hope I would get through it. Like Hannah, I became aware that there were real and valid reasons for the lament of my heart. Like Hannah, I had cried out to God from the depths with wordless groans. Like Hannah, I knew that God heard my prayer and brought me to a place to have this conversation with these two ladies.

When I reached my car, I realized my walk ended up being several miles of communion with my Savior and two sisters I now knew better than I had before that journey along the coast. God used Hannah’s faith and story to give me the courage to be honest with God and present my prayer need with groans because I didn’t know how to pray in all the confusion of this changing time in my life.

## **WALKING AND PRAYING WITH WOMEN OF THE BIBLE**

The thirty lessons contained in this book are each as unique as the women whose stories they tell. This is not meant to be an academic study of women in the Bible, but you will certainly learn from the Holy Spirit–inspired accounts of women who met God in real and personal ways. This is not meant to be a traditional Bible study, but you will learn from the scriptural records of real women who talked to the God who made them.

My prayer is that you will engage with each woman as a friend. Someone you could take a walk with and learn from. I hope after each lesson that you

feel like you have started a new relationship with a woman you will meet one day in glory. If you find yourself taking a walk with Jesus and Sarah, or Jesus and Elizabeth, or Jesus and Martha, this book will be the blessing I am praying God desires it to be.

## THE PATH AHEAD: ENGAGING IN THE JOURNEY

Each woman who reads this study is beautifully unique and your spiritual journey is just that . . . yours! In the same way, every woman in the Bible has her own story. Their encounters with God are like a rare pearl that has its own shape and shine. As you immerse yourself in the prayer experiences of these women, invite God to speak to you. Glean lessons that ignite your heart and enliven your imagination.

The vision of this study is for you to meet women from the pages of Scripture. To become more familiar with how prayer fit into their lives. To hear their voices lifted up in praise, calling out in pain, thanking God for his goodness, confessing brokenness, crying out for help, and so much more. Then, to see your prayer life expand and take on new and glorious depth, texture, and power.

## THE STRUCTURE OF EACH SESSION

To accomplish this vision and engage on a deep level with each biblical woman, we will do three things in each session of this study guide.

1. We will look at **Her Need**. With each scriptural woman, we will take time to get to know her as deeply as the biblical text and the leading of the Holy Spirit will allow. We will identify an area of need, struggle, challenge, or joy that she experienced. Some of the things that will give us a window into her story and soul will be her name (in the ancient world names often revealed a great deal about a person), her world and life context, some of her unique characteristics, and, of course, the biblical account.

In some cases, the prayer will be overt and recorded plainly in the biblical text. In other cases, we will focus on the woman's life situation and what she may have been praying about. Finally, some of the women have an implied prayer with only groaning, tears, shouts of joy, or some other

expression. In these cases, we will do our best to extrapolate her prayer with great attention to the biblical setting and with awareness of the way our hearts respond in specific life settings. With all of these women, we will seek to learn from their encounter with God in the flow of real life, from the depths of sorrow to the heights of joy.

2. We will take time to think about **My Need**. We will identify two or three lessons from each woman's journey and take time to reflect on how these specific experiences of an ancient sister can relate to our spiritual journey. You will have time to think, ponder, question, grapple, rejoice, and delight in where you are in your prayer journey.
3. In the third and final part of each session, we will think about **Our Prayer**. We will take a walk with each woman as we grow in prayer. You will find prayer exercises you can personalize and contextualize for your life. Each session will have prayer experiences that grow out of the heart and soul of the woman we learned from.

This simple structure will give you a focused look at the life of each woman and how prayer brought God near to them. In addition, it will help you take what you learn and instill it into your journey of faith and prayer.

## MY JOURNEY OF PRAYER

I love to read and have a wonderful library of books on prayer, spiritual formation, education, evangelism, and other topics that stir my soul. One thing I like to do is learn a little about the author. In some cases, I have had the privilege of meeting and getting to know the person who wrote the book, and this gives me a fresh perspective on what I am reading. With this in mind, I'd like to introduce myself and let you know a little about my journey.

I grew up in a home where talking with God was woven into the fabric of our daily family life. My journey of prayer began as far back into the recesses of my memory as I can go. There was a chorus we sang in church that I loved as a child. It painted a picture of intimacy with God that I carry with me to this

day. The hymn, written by Charles Austin Miles, is called "In the Garden." Here are the words of the chorus that captured my young heart:

... **I come to the garden alone,**  
*While the dew is still on roses;*  
*And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,*  
*The Son of God discloses.*

... **And He walks with me, and He talks with me,**  
*And He tells me I am His own,*  
*And the joy we share as we tarry there,*  
*None other has ever known (emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>*

This picture of intimacy with my Maker and of natural conversation with God is one that has guided me through the ups and downs of life. Prayer has been a foundation of my life through every season.

My prayer life has grown as I have walked with my husband, Kevin, for over forty years of marriage. Through the amazing highs and surprising lows, we have called out to God, listened for God, expressed our sorrow, and lifted up our praise as a couple. One by one, God provided us three sons: Zach, Josh, and Nate. I have watched them grow into men, marry godly wives, and now we have five grandchildren and five grand dogs. I pray for my sons, their wives, and the grandchildren every day. One of my greatest delights is that almost every week one of my sons or one of their wives will reach out and ask for prayer. We pray together often.

By God's kind grace, I have been able to write two in-depth studies about women in the Bible: *Twelve Women of the Bible* and *Twelve More Women of the Bible*. These were written in partnership with video studies taught by women such as Lysa TerKeurst, Lisa Harper, Bianca Juarez Olthoff, and Chrystal Evans Hurst, among others. In addition, I have had the honor of writing the book *Organic Prayer: Discover the Presence and Power of God in the Everyday*.

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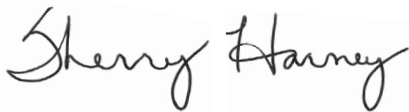
1 C. Austin Miles, "In the Garden," Hymnary, 1912, [https://hymnary.org/text/i\\_come\\_to\\_the\\_garden\\_alone](https://hymnary.org/text/i_come_to_the_garden_alone).

It is a biblical study on prayer and a collection of lessons and practices that help people lead a life immersed in communication with God.

In this thirty-day study, *Praying with Women of the Bible*, I have been intentional to focus on the stories of women in the Bible and how we can learn to pray from their life experiences. My voice, as a writer, is minimized in this book so that you can hear the stories, sorrows, joys, voices, and prayers of amazing women who walked in faith long before any of us were born. My prayer is that, as you meet them, you will be led to fresh, powerful, and life-changing places of conversation and intimacy with the God who made you and loves you. If someday, in this life or in glory, we get to meet, I would be honored to hear your stories of faith and prayer.

May you walk with him, talk with him, and hear the Lord of Glory whisper to your heart, *You are my own*. May the Holy Spirit help you encounter the God of heaven and his Son Jesus in unique and joyful ways as you walk with him and talk with him.

With you on the journey,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherry Harney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The name "Sherry" is written in a larger, more prominent script than "Harney". The signature is set against a light gray rectangular background.



# EVE

## *Praying When Temptation Is Near*

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GENESIS 3:1-20;  
2 CORINTHIANS 11:3

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## HER NEED

### MEETING EVE

Eve began her life in perfect paradise. Harmony was the norm. Sin had not yet descended on the human family. But temptation was still slithering through the land and looking for someone to entice. What do you do when the enemy dangles a tasty morsel in front of you, and everything inside of you wants to take a big bite? We have all been there.

Eve's name derives from the Hebrew word for life, and it likely means something like "life-giver," or "mother of us all." She was made by the very hands of God, and her life was a staggering collection of "firsts." She

was the first woman God spoke to as well as the first woman who spoke to God. She was the first woman with no history of sin. Eve was the first wife, the first mother, and the first

mom to lose a child. She was also the first woman to face Satan's enticing temptation and the first to give in to his lies. As we all know, she would not be the last.

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READ: GENESIS 3:1–20; 2 CORINTHIANS 11:3

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### REFLECT

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"  
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

—**Genesis 3:13**

### HER STORY

Prayer is being with the God who made us and communing with him. Prayer is both speaking to our Maker and also listening to his voice. The sense of Genesis 3 is that Adam and Eve had a pattern of walking and communing with God in the cool of the garden. Eve experienced face-to-face, perfect communication with her Maker. She lived a life of intimate prayer with God. What an incomprehensible gift!

At some point, God had given clear instructions and boundaries to Adam and Eve. Read these words from her conversation with the enemy: "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die"' (Genesis 3:2–3). Loving boundaries and a clear warning—God speaks those to all of his children.

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God's boundaries and sin entered the world, everything changed. When God showed up the next time (in Genesis 3:8), he had a few questions for Adam and Eve. God knew they were hiding and avoiding contact because they had stepped into the enemy's trap. They had swallowed the lure of the serpent and were hooked.

Adam and Eve were not walking with God. They were not listening to his voice. They were not talking to him. Any time we shift from talking with God to listening to the enemy of our soul, we are headed for trouble.

Do you see what happened to Eve? It is the same folly the enemy tries to entice us to embrace: Stop talking with God. Converse with Satan. This might sound a bit dramatic, but it is absolutely what Satan still does. When we start debat-

ing what God has said (in his Word and by his Holy Spirit) the battle is already half-way lost. We are in grave danger when we stop talking with God and miss the opportunity to meditate on his words.

After God called out Adam and Eve and they emerged from their hiding, we read of God's specific conversation with Eve: "What is this you have done?" (Genesis 3:13). Every one of us knows the feeling of being caught and called out. It might have been when you were a little girl, a

young teenager, or just last week. When we are caught, like Eve, the temptation is to cover one sin with another.

### **RATIONALIZATION. BLAME. FINGER-POINTING. LIES.**

The final words that God spoke to Eve in this heartbreaking drama were honest declarations of what consequences would mark the life of Eve (and women through history). Eve's story teaches us to make communication with our Maker a priority. This was her need, and it is ours. When temptation comes, pray. Don't turn from God but talk with him.

## MY NEED

Eve was living in paradise, and temptation still came her way. Every woman who seeks to walk with Jesus knows that the enemy is still whispering lies and dangling the poisoned fruit of enticement to sin right in front of us. We all



know the bitter results of taking that first bite. We also know the peace and joy that come when we turn to God, seek his power, talk with our Savior, and say no to temptation.

- ▶ When does the enemy most often seek to tempt you and draw you from the path of Jesus? Identify the common tactic of the enemy and be ready to call out to God in these moments.
  
- ▶ Think of a time you felt Satan's lure and ask God to help you identify the ways the enemy seeks to deceive you.
  
- ▶ How are you setting aside time and space to communicate with your Maker in ways that grow intimacy with God and strengthen you to stand strong against the enemy?

## LESSONS FROM EVE

1. **Cry out to God in times of need.** When we need help, when the enemy entices us, when Satan whispers or shouts lies, we need to call out to God and draw near him. Eve failed to do this but learned that God is always near; even when we run the other way, he draws near and finds us.
  
2. **Block your ears to the enemy.** Satan is a master manipulator and an experienced enticer. When we hear the sinister lies of the enemy, we need to plug our ears, talk more with God, fill our minds with Scripture, and find healthy believers to talk with and pray with.

3. **Learn to recognize the lies and deceit of the enemy.** One of Satan's best skills is camouflage. He does not want us to be aware of what he is up to and how he is seeking to destroy our lives. The apostle Paul writes these words in his second letter to the church in the city of Corinth, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (11:3). Make a point of identifying the most common ways he tries to lure you in, and then fortify yourself in advance to stand against his ploys and walk in pure devotion to Jesus.

## MY REFLECTIONS

What is God teaching me about prayer through Eve?

1. When God is speaking to you (through the Bible, by his Spirit, through a person, or some other way), how do you know it is your Creator speaking? What do you do to test and make sure you are hearing from God?
2. What are ways you can intentionally and consistently block your ears and heart from the lies, lures, and enticements of Satan?
3. Look back on your life and recall a time when you were so closely connected with your Maker that the enemy couldn't even get your attention. Describe that experience below.



# OUR PRAYER

## HONEST AND HUMBLE CONFESSION

When we fall into sin, we are all prone to run and hide from God. It is always best to run to God and confess. Take time to read Psalm 51, a powerful prayer of confession. Then, write your own prayer of confession.

## IDENTIFY AND FORTIFY

Ask God to show you two or three areas of your life where you tend to get tempted when you are not connected with your Maker. Write them down here or in your heart.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Lift up each of these areas of temptation in passionate prayer and ask God for eyes to see when you are being tempted, courage to fight back, and wisdom to run to God in these soul-challenging moments.

## PRAYER ECHOES

Learn from your sister Eve. Remember her story, both the good and the bad. Ask God to help you close your ears to the lies of the enemy and open your heart to the love, power, and grace of Jesus.



# HAGAR

## *Praying to the God Who Sees Me*

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GENESIS 16

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## HER NEED

### MEETING HAGAR

Unnoticed, unimportant, unseen. Many women have moments when they feel this way, and Hagar was no exception. She was of Egyptian descent, and her name might mean “flight” or “fugitive.” When you come to know her story, you’ll discover how fitting her name was.

Hagar was enslaved. The Bible does not affirm slavery, although in the ancient world (and sadly in parts of the world today) it was common. God hates oppression and is always seeking to care for the marginalized, and so should his people today. In Hagar’s world, polygamy (a man having more than

one wife) was common. It was also common for enslaved women to have the role of childbearing in their households. The fact that characters in the Bible adopted this practice is not an affirmation that it was right. Our focus is not to dissect the confusing-looking practices of people in the ancient world but to gain insight from Hagar's prayer in the midst of her broken life and culture.

Though she was marginalized, Hagar was the first person in the Bible to see an angel. God chose a foreigner, a female slave, to encounter the one true living God. She may have been mistreated by others, but God showed up and showed mercy to this hurting woman. She seemed to be a pawn on the chessboard of Abram and Sarai's lives, but she was seen and valued by God.

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## READ: GENESIS 16

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### REFLECT

*She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."*

—Genesis 16:13

### HER STORY

God shows up in our difficult times. The Lord of heaven cares for us even when others treat us poorly. Hagar learned what we all need to recognize: Even when no one else seems to see us or care about our needs, our Maker knows us, sees us, and loves us.

To understand the story of Hagar, we need a snapshot of how she was connected to Sarai (Sarah). God had promised Abram (Abraham) and Sarai descendants like the stars of the sky, even though they did not yet have any sons or daughters (Genesis 15:5). So, Sarai decided to run ahead of God's plan. At Sarai's suggestion and prompting, Abram agreed to marry Hagar (a woman enslaved in their household) and seek to have children with her. This led to immediate conflict when Hagar became pregnant. Chaos descended

on the family. Hagar could read the writing on the wall and knew Sarai did not want her around. She did what her name meant. She fled for the hills.

At this point, through a heavenly messenger, God spoke to Hagar. The conversation (paraphrased below) was honest and direct.



**Angel:** Where are you going? (Genesis 16:8)

**Hagar:** I'm running from my home and from Sarai. (Genesis 16:8)

**Angel:** Go back home. God's promise of many descendants is still true. You will have a son! (Genesis 16:9-12)

What happened next is a tender lesson to people of every generation until Jesus

comes again. Hagar gives God a name. In this prayer interaction, a broken, fugitive, praying woman identifies the character of God.

**Hagar:** You are the God who sees me. (Genesis 16:13)

How true. How personal. How needed. In a world where so many feel invisible, forgotten, or simply overlooked, this is a powerful reminder! In her prayer, Hagar has one more thing to say.

**Hagar:** I have now seen the One who sees me. (Genesis 16:13)

What joy this must have breathed into the suffocating fugitive Hagar! She went back to Abram. Her son Ishmael was born. And her story continued.

# MY NEED

Am I seen? Valued? Cherished?

In a world that has devalued almost everything, it is easy to think that we don't matter. In a time when celebrities and influencers have a voice but most of us do not, we can feel unheard and unseen. Yet the God who came to Hagar also let her know she was seen and valued. Hagar comes to us and declares the same message.

- ▶ Do you live each day aware that the Maker of the universe has his eyes firmly fixed on you?
  
- ▶ Are you confident that you are precious in God's sight and the apple of his eye?

If you take a slow and thoughtful walk with Hagar, you will discover that the God you worship sees you, and you can see him. God fills your need to be seen.

## LESSONS FROM HAGAR

1. **Suffering can open our eyes and heart to God.** The God we worship and serve does not cause or celebrate evil. Suffering is not his invention. But our God draws near when we are in pain and facing sorrow. It is in these times that we often see him more clearly. Don't forget to search for God even in the midst of those daunting moments of life.
2. **People may not see us, but God always does.** We all have times when we feel like Hagar. The world feels like it is spinning out of control, and in your pain you feel alone. No one sees you. No one understands. No one cares. But like Hagar, we need to learn that God sees us.

3. **God sees us, and we can see him.** It is easy to imagine that God sees us. He is God after all—of course he sees us. What is unique in Hagar's prayerful declaration is that she saw God! It is valuable to go through every day remembering that God sees you, and you can see him too. Keep your eyes open for "God-sightings."

### MY REFLECTIONS

How can lessons from Hagar's journey of faith impact my life?

1. What is a part of your life that is messy right now? How can you invite God to show up and be near you in your need?
2. When was a time that you were going through pain and suffering of some kind (relational, physical, financial, spiritual, emotional, or some other kind of suffering)? How did you experience God more profoundly during this time, and how did you see his face more clearly?
3. How will your outlook on life change if you live each day convicted that God sees you at all times?

## OUR PRAYER

### YOU SEE ME WHEN . . .

Think through a normal day. What do you do? Where do you go? Make a list of a few seemingly insignificant experiences of your life.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Read each one out loud and then declare, "God, you see me in this moment of my day, help me see you!"

### **OPEN MY EARS AND MY EYES**

Hagar saw the God who saw her. Sometimes we face significant struggles and feel alone. We might even run from God, from the church, and from family and friends. Mental health challenges, illness, marriage conflicts, frustrations at work, children who stray from us and the Lord—all of these can prompt us to isolate ourselves from God and our support systems. Write a prayer asking God to help you know that he is with you as you pray for help in any areas of struggle you are facing right now.

### **PRAYER ECHOES**

In her pain, loneliness, and fear, Hagar encountered God. She declared the name of God based on what she experienced with him. He was the God who saw her! Join Hagar in this prayer as you look on the One who loves you in the messes of life—the God who sees you and who shows up right where you are.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Sherry Harney** is the Spiritual Development Director at Shoreline Church in Monterey, California, and the co-founder of Organic Outreach International. For more than three decades, she has spoken about prayer, spiritual formation, leadership, and outreach for local, national, and international organizations. She has also authored several small group study guides and books, including her most recent book, *Organic Prayer: Discover the Presence and Power of God in the Everyday*.

# DEEPEN YOUR PRAYER LIFE WITH WOMEN FROM SCRIPTURE

The thirty lessons on prayer in this book are each as unique as the women whose stories they tell. This is neither an academic nor a traditional Bible study, but author and prayer leader Sherry Harney will help you learn from the biblical accounts of women who met God in real and personal ways with prayers of all forms.

As you learn about each woman in Scripture, you will see how they brought their needs to God in prayer, how intimately you are connected to their stories, and how to bring your own needs to God alongside them. Be encouraged by the examples we are given in Scripture of women who went before us and share in our common needs for prayer and communion with a holy and gracious God.

This Bible study includes:

- A woman's biblical story and related Scripture
- Reflections on connecting to each woman's circumstances
- Learning to take your needs to God in prayer
- Prayer exercises and echoes



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